

chill

ADVENTURES FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

119
ways to play
in the
Bay Area
and beyond

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Laura A. Oda/Staff Archives

The majesty of winter reveals itself in resplendent ways all over Northern California, inspiring us to take enthusiastic part in all it has to offer.

chill

HOLIDAY EXUBERANCE, WINTER HIKES AND OTHER COLD-WEATHER ESCAPADES



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TREE FARMS

Harvest *the Christmas spirit*



FIND THAT PRIZE FIR ON A YOU-CHOOSE TREE FARM



JANE TYSKA/STAFF ARCHIVE

Cutting your perfect piney candidate for your holiday tree can be a happy father-daughter project.

Short ones, tall ones, fat ones and round — the options abound on a choose-your-own farm.

BY JACKIE BURRELL

You don't have to be Nordic to appreciate the concept of hygge, the trendy Danish philosophy that's swept this country, too. In the winter months, we Northern Californians fully embrace the idea of cozy comfort, from holiday feasts and family gatherings to hot chocolate at a twinkle-lit ice rink — or the retro pleasure of a Christmas tree farm.

There's something magical about heading out to a tree farm to choose and chop your own Christmas tree. Few things con-

TREE FARMS

RIGHT: NADER KHOURI/BAY STAFF ARCHIVES; FAR RIGHT: DAN COYRO/SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL



jure up the wintry holiday season more immediately than the fragrance of Douglas fir and the feel of sharp needles and sticky sap on your hands, as you hoist the perfect tree into the car.

Years ago, the town of Moraga had a Christmas tree farm of its own. It stood at the end of a long dirt road with firs and pines aligned in merry rows. Every Thanksgiving weekend, the farm's big white gate was flung open, and families flocked in. Our youngest kids, pink-cheeked from the cold and pompoms quivering atop their striped beanies, dashed down the rows of trees, as their older sibs surveyed the pines with a critical eye. Was this the perfect tree? Or that one?

The Norman Rockwellian scene plays out every season across the Bay Area, from Petaluma to Half Moon Bay and the Santa Cruz Mountains, which is where the

A family outing to scout out the perfect tree includes a short break for some cider or hot chocolate.

story of California's Christmas tree farms actually began. When Crest Ranch opened in 1948, it was the first to offer guests the chance to choose and cut their own Douglas fir, Scotch pine or one of the other seven varieties grown atop Ben Lomond Mountain.

Crest Ranch quickly became a tradition, one filled with the heavenly smell of pine trees, plus picnics, gorgeous views and dog-friendly terrain. Families made the annual pilgrimage for decades, first with grandparents and then with babies of their own. Many of them share their fond tales online, on Yelp or on the ranch website, where Boulder Creek resident David Chorjel, for example, recalls "coming to Crest Ranch every year since 1980. It is so much a part of our holiday tradition, that it is considered the first Christmas present we give to



Big brother gives sis a lift so she can scope out all the options from a higher vantage point.

each other every year."

What began at Crest Ranch spread quickly. By 1952, so many tree farms had opened, the region's growers launched a California Christmas Tree Association. Today, there are tree farms sprinkled across these hills, with at least five tree farms perched atop the South Bay's Skyline Ridge and half a dozen more in Santa Clara

TREE FARMS

Find a sustainable Christmas tree farm near you at www.cachristmas.com. Most tree farms accept cash and checks, not credit cards. Some farms offer picnic areas and hot cider; others go all out with train rides, Santa photo ops and other merry frolic. Check the tree farm website for specifics, including hours, prices and offerings.

County.

In the East Bay hills, where UC Berkeley forestry professor Ed Gilden and his wife Tee opened their Castro Valley Christmas Tree Farm in 1965, those decades of holiday tradition continue. Families roam the 12 acres of trees — carefully replenished by now-owner Paul Illingworth, who began managing the farm in 1974 and who plants anywhere from 6,000 to 12,000 seedlings per year — in search of not just trees, but cozy holiday memories.

Of course, you don't have to don boots and source a saw to acquire a Christmas tree (most of these farms have saws to borrow, by the way). Moraga's long-gone tree farm lingers in our memories, but these days, we haul home a precut tree from a lot at the other end of town. It's less romantic and adventurous, but it's faster and — now we sound like a Hallmark holiday movie about multitaskers who've lost their merry mojo.



GEORGE SAKKESTAD/LOS GATOS WEEKLY TIMES

It's all smiles after finding the perfect Christmas tree at the Patchen Christmas Tree Farm in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

TREE FARMS



BOTTOM: COURTESY OF DONALD R. WINSLOW TOP: GEORGE SAKKESTAD/LOS GATOS WEEKLY TIMES



Hauling the cut tree to the family car is the most labor-intensive part of the expedition. Mom and son let Pop do the heavy lifting.

Clearly, we need to find a new tree farm.

Of course, whether you're hitting the downtown tree lot or going on a tree-chopping adventure, the specific mode of pine acquisition is not what's essential.

It's the hygge of it: a day spent with family and friends outdoors, followed by the glory of twinkle lights wrapped round those fragrant branches. The tree is home — and a tree-trimming party is an effortless way to get your holiday vibe going. Pour hot cider, mulled wine or sparkling cocktails. Set a buffet with hearty fare, lasagna or a saucy pasta, salad and a platter of butterscotch-fudge brownies. And queue up that holiday playlist. There are ornaments to hang.

A father and son team up as they trim off the lower branches of a Christmas tree they cut down at the Patchen Christmas Tree Farm in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

7 merry Christmas tree farms

There's something magical about choosing a Christmas tree at a farm, rather than an asphalt-paved lot. Here are seven merry options — and some don't even require an axe.

Castro Valley Christmas Tree Farm

This venerable 40-year-old tree farm opens its gates for the season on Nov. 23 at the corner of Redwood and Miller Roads. Bring the family and enjoy the great outdoors, as you choose and cut your own holiday tree. The tree farm is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday-Sunday. www.cvchristmastreefarm.com

Silveyville Christmas Tree Farm, Dixon

Silveyville has been a merry family tradition for the last three decades, offering not only its own Christmas trees — more than 15,000 of them! — but thousands of fresh-cut trees from Oregon, as well. Enjoy fresh popcorn and hot apple cider by the fire pit as you ponder those choices. The 20-acre farm has a Snow Castle for kids, reindeer rides and weekend visits with Santa and his elves. The farm opens for the season on Nov. 24 at 6248 Silveyville Road in Dixon. Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saws are provided. www.silveyvilletreefarm.com

Lemos Farm, Half Moon Bay

Take a train or hay ride through Lemos Farm's groves of Christmas trees and choose from among Douglas fir, Incense cedar, Monterey cypress and Monterey pine. Kids will also enjoy the pony rides, petting zoo and playtown. Open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Nov. 23 and weekends through Dec. 23 at 12320 San Mateo Road (Highway 92). www.lemosfarm.com

Smith Family Farm, Brentwood

No axes necessary. This family farm offers fresh-cut Douglas, Noble and Nordmann firs from

Oregon and Washington, in sizes that range from tabletop to more than 12-feet high. Santa Claus visits on weekends. And don't miss the country store, which is stocked with handmade wreaths, garlands and gifts. Open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekends at 4430 Sellers Ave.; <https://bit.ly/2RqXhiS>.

Patchen California Christmas Tree Farms, Los Gatos

Both of these farms — one at 2217 Old Santa Cruz Highway, the other at 17430 Old Summit Road — offer the same seasonal fun. Bring a picnic for a day among the pines. Cut your own tree or buy one fresh-cut. Enjoy the bonfire (held at 4 p.m. daily), hot cider and photo ops with Santa. And there's wine tasting on Friday afternoons, too. Open Nov. 18 through Christmas Eve. Find details at patchen-california.com.

Little Hills Christmas Tree Farm, Petaluma

For the last 25 years, families have strolled through this farm, choosing and cutting their own fresh trees and enjoying visits from Santa and the sheer spectacle of those flocked trees. The farm will be open to the public from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 23, and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends thereafter. 961 Chapman Lane; <https://bit.ly/2Nsqqjke>

Battaglia Ranch Christmas Tree Farm, San Martin

Cut a Leyland cypress, Monterey pine or a Monterey cypress at this San Martin farm, or choose from among the pre-cut fir trees from Oregon. Then enjoy a train or reindeer ride, browse for gifts at the farm shop and enjoy a cup of hot cocoa. Santa will be there from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 23-25 and Dec. 1-2. Regular farm hours are 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Nov. 23-Dec. 16 and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 17-22 at 13580 Murphy Ave.; <https://bit.ly/2DZFX25>

— LISA HERENDEEN



TOP: DAN COVRO/SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL; BELOW: JANE TYSKA/STAFF ARCHIVES



Driving rain at Crest Ranch Christmas Tree Farm didn't stop these hunters from harvesting the perfect tree.

An outsize antique Santa welcomes customers to the Castro Valley Christmas Tree Farm.



GETTY IMAGES

Start the holiday season with a festive, family-friendly tree-trimming party.

Treat 'em while they tree trim

Turn your Christmas tree trimming into a party, and you'll have your halls decked in no time at all. Invite family and friends, queue up a holiday playlist and serve up hot cider or sparkling wine, garnished with cranberries and a sprig of fresh rosemary for instant holiday appeal. As for food, set out a buffet of simple — and simply delicious — fare, such as this sensational saucy pasta from Homeroom co-founder Allison Arevalo and bar cookies from San Francisco's Guittard family.

Late last year, an overstressed Arevalo left her popular mac-centric restaurant to focus on her family. Inspired by the big Italian Sunday dinners she grew up with, Arevalo began hosting Pasta Friday — big, casual parties at her Rockridge home with family and friends, a big salad and a giant pot of pasta, a different variety each week.

Now Pasta Friday is a cookbook — due out from Andrews McMeel Publishing next September — with a lineup that includes her father's creamy roasted red-pepper sauce served with penne, rigatoni or cannolicchi.

You couldn't ask for better party fare, she says: "We would beg, BEG, my dad to make this sauce. My sister, Lenore, and I would cause such a scene that he would have no choice but to say yes. Then we'd call Jen, our best friend and neighbor, and tell her to run over quick, because dad was making 'the sauce.' We wouldn't have to say which one. She knew."

Soon you will, too. Serve the pasta with a big salad and garlic bread. Finish with something sweet, such as this layered fudge brownie-meets-butterscotch blondie. The recipe hails from San Francisco's Guittard Chocolate, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.

— JACKIE BURRELL

Dad’s Famous Roasted Red Pepper Sauce with Cannolicchi

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients:

3 pounds red bell peppers, roasted, peeled, and seeded (see note below)

1 pint heavy cream

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter

1 head garlic, roasted and squeezed into a bowl (see note below)

1 teaspoon smoked paprika

1 teaspoon ground Calabrian chile or marash pepper

Kosher salt

1 pound cannolicchi, penne, rigatoni or campanelle pasta

Finely grated Parmigiana-Reggiano, for serving

Directions:

In a blender or food processor, puree roasted peppers with the heavy cream in a blender or food processor, working in batches if necessary. The amount of cream listed here works well for 3 pounds of peppers, but keep an eye on the color of the sauce. You want a bright, bold orangey pink, not a muted mauve.

Melt the butter in a large heavy pot over medium-low heat. Whisk 1 tablespoon of the roasted garlic into the butter.

(Reserve the rest of the garlic for another use.)

Next add smoked paprika, chile powder and 1 teaspoon of salt.

Add the puréed peppers to the pot and stir. Decrease the heat to low and let the sauce simmer for 10 to15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Taste for salt and add more if needed.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil and add 2 tablespoons of salt.

Cook the pasta until it’s slightly firmer than al dente (2 minutes less than it says on the package). Drain.



GETTY IMAGES

Add the pasta directly into the pot with the sauce, and gently stir to fully coat the pasta and to finish cooking, about 3 minutes longer.

How to roast peppers:

Turn on the broiler. Place the red bell peppers on a baking sheet, drizzle them with olive oil and sprinkle with kosher salt.

Broil the peppers for about 6 minutes, or until the skins are completely charred.

Flip them over and broil the other side for another 6 minutes. When the skins are all black, place the peppers in a brown paper bag to help steam them and loosen the skins.

When they’re cool enough to handle, remove the stems, seeds and skins. Do not rinse.

How to roast garlic:

Cut the top third off the garlic head. Place it on a small sheet of aluminum foil, and drizzle olive oil and salt on top. Close the foil around the garlic and roast, cut side up, for 45 minutes or until the garlic is caramelized and soft. Squeeze the garlic cloves into a small bowl.

— COURTESY ALLISON AREVALO, “THE PASTA FRIDAY COOKBOOK” (ANDREWS MCMEEL, 2019)

Guittard’s Butterscotch Fudge Brownies

Makes 16 two-inch squares

Ingredients:

2 cups unsifted all-purpose flour

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

2 cups (12 ounces) Guittard semisweet chocolate chips, divided

2 cups (12 ounces) Guittard butterscotch chips, divided

2 tablespoons water, divided

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter

1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar

3 large eggs

1 teaspoons vanilla extract

¾ cup (3 ounces) coarsely chopped walnuts

Directions:

Heat oven to 350 degrees.

Butter the bottom of a 9-by-9-inch pan and line it with foil.

In a bowl, combine the flour, baking powder and salt .

In a microwave-safe bowl, melt 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips with 1 tablespoon water at medium power (50 percent) for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring well after the first minute, then at 30 second intervals until smooth.

Set aside. If oil separation occurs, it will stir back in later.

In another microwave-safe bowl, melt 1 cup butterscotch chips with 1 tablespoon water following the same procedure.

Using an electric mixer at medium speed, cream butter and brown sugar together until it resembles a ball of dough.

Beat in eggs, one at a time, and vanilla, beating until smooth, stopping to scrape bowl as needed.

Add flour mixture on low speed just until incorporated.

Divide the batter into 2 equal parts, adding half to the bowl with the melted butterscotch chips and the other half to the melted semisweet chips.

Return the contents of the butterscotch bowl and the walnuts to the mixer bowl and mix until evenly combined.

Spread into bottom of prepared pan. Sprinkle with remaining 1 cup semisweet chips and 1 cup butterscotch chips.

Add the melted chocolate-batter to the mixer bowl and mix until combined. Gently layer over chips and spread to edges to cover chips as evenly as possible.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes or until the top looks set and dry and springs back when lightly touched.

Cool on rack for 90 minutes or overnight, then refrigerate for 1 hour to fully set the chocolate before cutting.

To cut, remove foil-lined brownie from pan and cut into 16 squares with a large sharp knife.

— GUITTARD.COM



Over the river and through the woods

STORY BY JIM HARRINGTON • ILLUSTRATION BY JESSIE FORD

25 songs to keep the road trip on a roll

The road trip is not just a summer thing. We Californians hit the highway for adventures 12 months a year — including the holidays and ski season.

But what's a road trip without a proper soundtrack? We've come up with a play list filled with winter-friendly tunes and holiday songs. You don't need us to sing the praises of Nat King Cole, Johnny Mathis and other classic Christmas crooners — you already know all about them. So we're focusing on some more unusual suspects and recordings that deserve wider recognition.

Ready to ride? Here's our soundtrack for the season:

1 “The Christmas Song”
We're kicking off our journey with a gorgeous, slowly sung version of this Christmas classic, delivered with care by the great Diana Krall and the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra.

2 “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”
There are plenty of worthwhile versions that could make the list — indeed, that's the case with all the standards — but let's highlight this gorgeous recent rendition by Lauren Daigle, who possesses a voice everyone should hear.

3 “What Child Is This?”
Chris Tomlin, the Grammy-winning singer-songwriter who topped the Billboard 200 with 2013's “Burning Lights,” delivers a poignant take on this Christmas classic.

4 “Song for a Winter's Night”
Leaving the traditional holiday songbook for the moment, we turn to one of the greatest songwriters of all time — Gordon Lightfoot — for a tune that lives up to its title in every way.

5 “River”
Oh, you might have guessed this would make the cut. But we don't mind being predictable when it means getting to hear Joni Mitchell soar through this emotionally raw folk favorite off 1971's “Blue.”

6 “A Hazy Shade of Winter”
Simon & Garfunkel originally released this song in 1966, but we'd much rather crank up the Bangles' rocking version from 1987.

7 “Coldest Winter”
It's Kanye West at his heartbreaking best on the 2008 “808s & Heartbreak” album, looking back at memories made in “the coldest winter” and wondering “will I ever love again?”

8 “Holiday Road”
OK, it's time to change the mood. And this campy blast of '80s nostalgia, courtesy of Fleetwood Mac legend Lindsey Buckingham and the “National Lampoon's Vacation” film, should do the trick.

9 “Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out”
Some might call out for Bruce Springsteen's popular version of “Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town,” but we prefer this fun rocker originally released on the landmark “Born to Run” album in 1975.

10 “I'll Take the Rain”
We don't get much snow in the Bay Area, but a little precipitation would be nice this season. So with that in mind, sing along at top volume to this stunningly beautiful R.E.M. number, from 2001's vastly underrated “Reveal.”

11 “8 Days (of Hanukkah)”
Time to roll down Hanukkah highway for a pair of tunes, kicking off with this soulful, horn-fueled number by Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings.

12 “Hanukkah (Favorite Time of the Year)”
Turn up the Too \$hort and let the Bay Area rapper detail why he loves this time of year: “I got eight gifts coming, one for each night / It's my favorite holiday, you better treat a player right.”

13 “Little Saint Nick”
By law, we are required to include at least one Beach Boys tune in every play list we make about California. It's a good law. We're glad we made it.

14 “Fairytale of New York”
Simply put, we wouldn't be allowed to show our faces in certain places if we didn't include this cherished Christmas tune by Irish pub-punk greats, the Pogues.

15 “My Only Wish (This Year)”
Besides cherishing the idea of following up the Pogues with Britney Spears, we just have a soft spot for the pop star's sweetly innocent plea for Santa to bring her “someone to love” for Christmas.

16 “8 Days of Christmas”
The amazing vocal harmonies of Destiny's Child have rarely been more fully on display than on this memorable ode to commercialism and consumerism.

17 “Doughnut for a Snowman”
Instead of “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer,” we're giving you another seasonal song with one of the best titles of all time. It's a nice garage-pop nugget from Guided by Voices, who deliver praise for a Krispy Kreme that is as “sweet as life can get.”

18 “If We Make It Through December”
Merle Haggard recorded a lot of great Christmas music over the years, but the most touching of his seasonal offerings is this poetic original about a man going into the holiday season having just lost his job. Grab a hanky.

19 “Christmas in Prison”
We'll stay in America's Greatest Songwriters section a bit longer, enjoying this touching folk tune, which mixes heartbreak and humor in typical John Prine style.

20 “Little Drummer Boy”
Bob Seger delivers what just might be the best classic-rock rendition of a Christmas standard. (Yes, even better than Springsteen's “Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town.”)

21 “Joy to the World”
REO Speedwagon, the band that had the top-selling album of the year in 1981 with “High Infidelity,” has gotten a late-career boost from the fine holiday album “Not So Silent Night ... Christmas with REO Speedwagon.”

22 “Adore Him”
Kari Jobe shines on this sweetly moving number, rooted in the traditional “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”

23 “Sweet Little Jesus Boy”
Let's motor down the highway with some gospel music, turning first to Mahalia Jackson, who shows why she's known as the Queen of Gospel on this striking number.

24 “O Holy Night”
We wouldn't think about ending this musical road trip without a stop in the 5-1-0, calling upon one of the many worthwhile selections from Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir's “Rejoice” Christmas album.

25 “Silent Night”
The journey has almost come to its conclusion. But we have time for one more, so we'll end with Phil Wickham and his excellent take on one of the greatest holiday songs of all time.

CHILL

RINKS & DRINKS



Follow up that chilly skating session on the ice with a steaming cup of hot chocolate

BY ANGELA HILL

Visions of sugar-plums twirling triple axels and landing perfect-10 salchows dance through your head at this time of year. On the ice at sparkling outdoor rinks, skilled skaters make it look so easy.

For the rest of us, both balance and dignity waver on ridiculously slim slivers of metal. You cling to the rail as your legs slide in more directions than anatomically possible, causing you and your equally unstable friends to collapse in a heap of laughter and frozen backsides.

But it's fun, it's festive, and now it's time for a post-skate

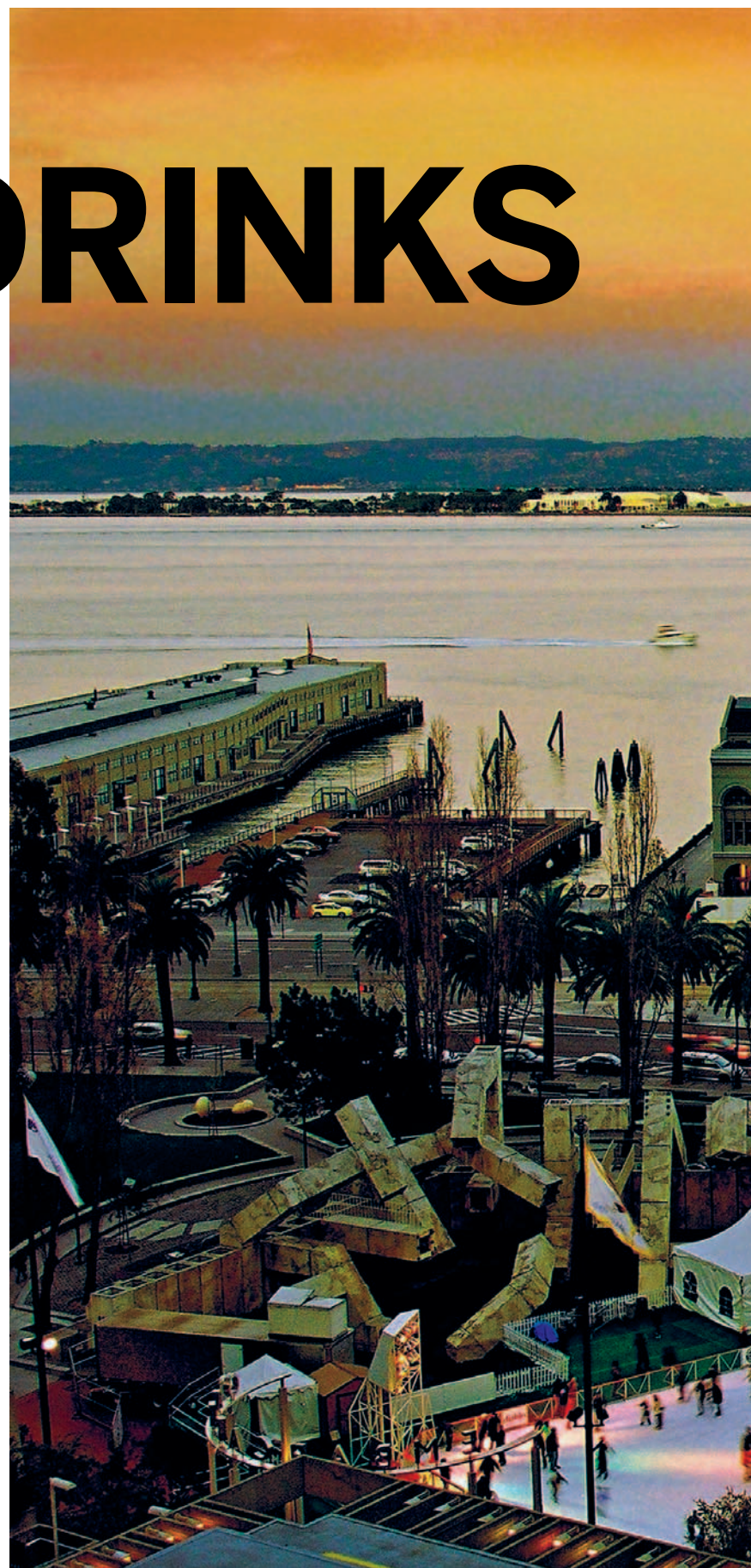
(Above) Tratto's Cioccolata Calda con Amaro provides a perfect post-skate warm-up for grown-ups. The San Francisco restaurant offers kid-friendly cocoa, too.

(Right) The holiday ice rink at San Francisco's Embarcadero Center lets you do that triple lutz by the bay.

warm-up. And one thing at which we're all definitely skilled is the art of sipping delicious hot cocoa, mitten-muffed hands caressing the cup and frosty lips pressed to the cozy elixir of comfort.

The hot melts away the cold, confirming the appeal of such opposites – you know, like yin/yang, ebony/ivory, Heat Miser/Snow Miser. And nothing goes hand-in-mittened-hand more than ice skating and hot chocolate in the winter chill.

Whether you're skating across rinks backed by the twinkling city lights of San Francisco's Union Square or the snow-draped slopes of Mount Shasta, it's all about the setting and the slurp of something warm.





PHOTOS COURTESY: TRATTO AND EMBARCADERO CENTER



MAGIC HAPPENS

For some, holiday skating is a longstanding family tradition. At Winter Lodge in Palo Alto – smack dab in Silicon Valley – the frosty frolicking goes back decades. It began in 1954, when Duncan Williams moved to the Bay Area from Wisconsin to teach engineering and soon realized Californians were missing out on a special winter custom.

“He thought how fun it would be if families could have that same experience he grew up with, of ice skating in winter,” says Linda Stebbins Jensen, Winter Lodge’s executive director. “His engineering brain started going, and he figured out a clever system of refrigeration that could keep

A 9,000 square-foot ice skating rink sits at the center of the village at Northstar, surrounded by cabanas, fire pits and plenty of winter cheer.

Young neophyte skaters get an assist at a seasonal outdoor rink in Folsom, where snow flurries are part of the fun.



ice frozen, even in our mild weather. It became the first outdoor ice-skating rink west of the Sierra.”

Skating season at the Lodge, which opened in 1956, runs from late September through mid-April, with public skating and classes on both indoor and outdoor rinks. But the holidays are classic. The weather is cooler, and lights sparkle on the outdoor rink amid towering trees. Fireplaces in the clubhouse and on the patio offer glowing warmth.

And even the hot chocolate is a well-loved tradition — not by virtue of its gourmet-artisan-organic cacao, but by virtue of its vending machine.

“Lots of frosty hands have gotten warm on that hot chocolate,”



KIRSTINA SANGSACHART/ DAILY NEWS

Stebbins Jensen says. “It’s not Starbucks, but it’s good.”

GOURMET TO GO

If you do want to chill with fancy chocolate flair, San Francisco offers elegant gourmet-artisan-organic options. After skating at the Holiday Ice Rink in Union Square, with its sky-high Christmas tree and glittery menorah, head over to Tratto — inside The Marker Hotel — for an Italian hot chocolate treat like the Cioccolata Calda, made with Ghirardelli chocolate and housemade marshmallows, or the Cioccolata Calda con Amaro dessert cocktail, an adult bev made with Montenegro and Orangetcello. You can get one free after 3 p.m. if

you show your ice-rink ticket.

Down at the holiday rink at Embarcadero Plaza, slide over to the Dandelion Chocolates kiosk at the Ferry Building Marketplace and pile up the free marshmallows on the special holiday Gingerbread Hot Chocolate. Or try the Recchiuti Confections booth, where the seasonal go-to is peppermint thins dropped into the Recchiuti Dark Hot Chocolate mixture or a dollop of their burnt caramel sauce to brighten up the deep, dark flavor.

Of course, chocolate has long been a favorite holiday indulgence for chocolatier Michael Recchiuti’s family. “If he and his three siblings were good, they’d get an extra bonus of a little chocolate

Flurries of artificial snow bring big grins and open-mouthed delight for young skaters at the Winter Lodge in Palo Alto.

from his Nonna!” says Jacky Recchiuti, Michael’s wife and partner in chocolating mischief.

CAN’T BEAT THE CLASSICS

Up in Folsom, there’s classic festive fun as folks circle a doughnut-shaped rink built around the historic railroad turntable. It’s a winter wonderland of music, holiday cheer and snow. Large nutcrackers, originally part of the “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” movie set, have been turned into speakers with snow machines mounted on top. Flurries occur on a regular basis, and the rink’s Bravo Coffee bar serves pour-over coffee and, yes, fabulous cocoa.

For a true holiday-card feel, it’s hard to top colorfully clad skat-

ers sliding beside snowy views at Siskiyou Skate Rink in Mt. Shasta, where legitimately wintry temperatures kick in and warm beverages come into play every day — but especially on Full-Moon Skate Nights and the New Year’s morning Pajama Skate. Non-gourmet cocoa can be had at the rink, but there are several places in town, like Yaks Mount Shasta Coffee & Eatery or Seven Suns Coffee & Café, where you can fill up your Thermos with something sweet and hot.

Wherever you skate and slurp, the combo lends itself to good vibes, comfort and conviviality. It’s an all-around nostalgic holiday feel for kids, adult kids and sugar plums alike.

8 incredible rinks

Ice skating followed by a delectable hot cocoa has to be the ultimate holiday pairing. Here's just a taste of Northern California's most scenic outdoor seasonal ice rinks, with hot-chocolate choices to boot!

1 Winter Lodge, Palo Alto

For more than 60 years, families have flocked to these serene indoor and outdoor rinks in the heart of what's now Silicon Valley. For the holidays, the clubhouse, fireplaces and outdoor rink sparkle with twinkling lights and holiday trees.

Icy details: General admission is \$12. Open for public skating from late September to mid-April at 3009 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto; www.winterlodge.com.

Hot stuff: The best hot chocolate at the Winter Lodge comes straight from the classic vending machine on site, a longstanding Lodge tradition.

2 Union Square Holiday Ice Rink, San Francisco

In the heart of the city, surrounded by glittery holiday windows at Saks, Neiman and Macy's (don't miss the kittens and puppies in the windows!), colorful blurs glide around a massive Christmas tree and a lighted menorah. There are special events like Drag Queens on Ice, and you can even ring in the New Year with Polar Bear Skating, where skaters are encouraged to dress "barely there" in their chicest, wildest and most inventive beach attire.

Icy details: \$18 for adults, \$13 for children 8 and under (skate rental included). Open from November through mid-January at 333 Post St.; www.unionsquare-icerink.com.

Hot stuff: A short walk away is Tratto, a new trattoria inside The Marker hotel, which offers complimentary Italian Hot Chocolate, available after 3 p.m. daily throughout the holiday season when you show your Union Square ice rink ticket; www.tratto-sf.com.

TOP: SACRAMENTO BEE; BOTTOM: WINTER LODGE



(Top picture) Children and adults enjoy an evening of ice skating at the Folsom Ice Rink in Old Folsom. The Ice Rink opens November 9th and continues until the end of the season on January 21, 2019.

At Winter Lodge, the twinkle-lit outdoor ice skating rink in Palo Alto, the frosty frolicking goes back decades.

3 Holiday Ice Rink at Embarcadero Center, San Francisco

Backed by a view of the Bay Bridge and Ferry Building, the seasonal rink has been a San Francisco tradition for more than 25 years. Off the Grid trucks are usually parked nearby on Saturdays, and nights sparkle with the Bay Lights installation on the bridge.

Icy details: \$12 adults, \$7 children 8 and under. Open November through mid-January on Embarcadero Plaza, adjacent to Four Embarcadero Center; www.embarcaderocenter.com.

Hot stuff: Post-skate, walk over to the Ferry Building Marketplace to the Dandelion Chocolate kiosk for exquisite European drinking chocolate or the seasonal Gingerbread Hot Chocolate; www.dandelionchocolate.com. Or try the Recchiuti Confections booth

nearby for Recchiuti Dark Hot Chocolate, which is perfect for dipping peppermint thins; www.recchiuti.com.

4 Downtown Sacramento Holiday Ice Rink, Sacramento

This rink has been a seasonal tradition on "The Kay" (the corner of K and Seventh streets) since 1991, creating a signature holiday experience for the region with special events like a Silent Disco skate night.

Icy details: \$13-\$15 adults, \$6 children 6 and under. Open November to January in St. Rose of Lima Park; www.godowntownsac.com/events.

Hot stuff: The rink partners with a Starbucks right across the street, but those in the know suggest the short walk to Steamers in Old Sacramento, a great place to load your Thermos with hot cocoa (and there's a full soda fountain, if you want to go frosty); www.steamersoldsac.com.

5 Siskiyou Skate Rink, Mount Shasta

Siskiyou's seasonal rink — possibly the only full NHL-sized outdoor rink in the country — takes advantage of the region's long, cold winter season in the shadow of Mount Shasta. Fun special events are sprinkled throughout the season, like Full Moon skates, New Year's morning Pajama Skate and Cheap Skate Night, a community event where

you pay what you're able.

Icy details: \$10 adults, \$8 teens and \$7 children 12 and under. Open November through February in Shastice Park, 800 Rockfellow Drive, Mount Shasta; www.siskiyou-ourink.org.

Hot stuff: There's hot chocolate at the rink, but if you want something more in the gourmet mocha vein, try Yaks Mount Shasta Koffee & Eatery in town; www.yaksmt-shasta.com.

6 Folsom Historic District Ice Rink, Folsom

This beautiful circular ice rink was designed specifically for the plaza in Historic Folsom, built around the vintage railroad roundhouse in 2012. Snow flurries erupt regularly from nutcracker speakers/snow machines around the rink.

Icy details: November through mid-January; \$12 adults, \$10 children 8 and under; 200 Wool St.; www.folsomicerink.com.

Hot stuff: Folsom's Bravo Coffee Bar, which offers locally roasted coffee beans and hand-crafted beverages, serves pour-over coffee and yummy hot cocoa all season at the rink; www.bravocoffeebar.homesteadcloud.com.

7 Paradise On Ice, Paradise

This delightful small ice rink, just east of Chico, offers everything from coffee socials to Ugly Christmas Sweater days and pajama sessions.

Icy details: General admission \$12. Open from November through mid-January at 6626 Skyway; www.paradisepripd.com.

Hot stuff: Get your tasty hot cocoa at the rink's concession stand.

8 Northstar Ice Rink, Truckee

This 9,000 square-foot ice skating rink sits at the center of the village at Northstar, surrounded by cozy cabanas, fire pits and winter holiday cheer.

Icy details: Free. Open from November through ski season at 5001 Northstar Drive; www.northstarcalifornia.com.

Hot stuff: The Cabana Bar and Rink Bar, just steps from the ice rink, serve steamy hot chocolate for all and an adults-only Dirty Snowman spiked with vanilla vodka, hazelnut liqueur and Irish cream. Yum.

— ANGELA HILL

Sweet secrets

San Francisco's chocolate fame dates back to the Gold Rush, when Domenico Ghirardelli and Etienne Guittard began their careers as chocolatiers. But small-batch, bean-to-bar chocolatiers, such as Dandelion Chocolate, have joined the delicious scene in recent years. Dandelion serves up sinfully delicious riffs on the chocolate theme — including several decadent hot chocolates — from its Mission district factory cafe and its kiosk in the Ferry Building Marketplace, just steps from the Embarcadero's seasonal holiday ice rink.

Dandelion's House Hot Chocolate is “our take on an all-American favorite,” says Dandelion pastry chef Lisa Vega in Dandelion's “Making Chocolate: From Bean to Bar to S'more” cookbook, which was published just last year. “Using nonfat milk allows the chocolate to take center stage, and the nearly 2:1 ratio makes it thinner — and tastier to most kids — and easy to drink lots of,



which we consider a plus.”

The recipe was developed by Dandelion's first pastry chef, Phil Ogiela, as a lighter, more American twist on the cafe's crazy-popular European Drinking Chocolate, which is made with whole milk — and tastes like you're sipping a

molten chocolate bar.

Looking for a more seasonal sip? Dandelion's Gingerbread Hot Chocolate adds classic gingerbread spices — cinnamon, ginger, cloves and nutmeg — and a touch of molasses to the mix. You end up with more spice mix than you need for this recipe, but the spice mix keeps indefinitely in a glass jar, and it's perfect for holiday baking, too. Or you could just make more hot chocolate.

— JACKIE BURRELL

Dandelion's European Drinking Chocolate is a rich, thick, Italian-style hot cocoa that's served daily in the San Francisco chocolate company's factory cafe.

Finish off your day of San Francisco ice skating with a stop at the Recchiuti Confections booth in the Ferry Building Marketplace, where peppermint thins are added to dark hot chocolate for seasonal fun.



Dandelion's House Hot Chocolate

Serves 4

Ingredients:

2½ cups nonfat milk, divided use
1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar
1½ cups chopped chocolate, 70-percent cacao

Directions: Combine 1 cup milk and the brown sugar in a large heatproof bowl set over a pot of simmering water. Heat the milk mixture until steaming, whisking occasionally.

Add the chocolate to the hot milk and whisk to combine, keeping the bowl over the pot to continue heating it. Whisk the mixture for an additional 3 minutes, until shiny and emulsified. This mix — ganache — may seem quite thick at this point.

Whisk in the rest of the milk, adding it in a slow stream, and heat for another 4 to 5 minutes, whisking occasionally, until hot.

Remove the bowl from the pot of water, pour the hot chocolate into mugs and serve immediately. As always, we recommend adding a few marshmallows.

Dandelion's Gingerbread Hot Chocolate

Serves 5

Gingerbread spice mix:

7 teaspoons ground cinnamon
9½ teaspoons ground ginger
2 teaspoons ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon ground cloves

Hot chocolate:

4¼ cups nonfat milk, divided use
1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar
1½ cups chopped chocolate, 70-percent cacao
2½ teaspoons molasses
1½ teaspoons gingerbread spice mix

Directions:

Combine the gingerbread spice mix ingredients, whisking to combine. Set aside.

Combine 1 cup milk and the brown sugar in a large heatproof bowl set over a pot of simmering water. Heat the milk mixture until steaming, whisking occasionally.

Add the chocolate to the hot milk and whisk to combine, keeping the bowl over the pot to continue heating it. Whisk the mixture for an additional 3 minutes, until shiny and emulsified.

Add the molasses and 1½ teaspoons of gingerbread spice mix to the bowl, and whisk to combine.

Whisk in the remaining milk, adding it in a slow stream. Continue heating the hot chocolate until steaming, about 10 minutes, whisking occasionally.

Remove the bowl from the pot of water, pour the hot chocolate into mugs and serve immediately, topped with marshmallows.

— DANDELION CHOCOLATE'S “MAKING CHOCOLATE FROM BEAN TO BAR TO S'MORE” (CLARKSON POTTER, 2017)

TOP: COURTESY OF ERIC WOLFINGER; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF RECCHIUTI CONFECTIONS

MIXOLOGY

POP-UPS

put on-the-spot cheer in your holiday sipping



COURTESY OF DECK THE HALLS

San Francisco's Deck the Halls cocktail pop-up makes merry with its decor. Last year, it featured a whimsical penguin wall.



BY JESSICA YADEGARAN

Chefs aren't the only culinary creatives doing pop-ups these days. Mixologists have begun hosting holiday cocktail pop-ups that marry their love of seasonal ingredients with the whole point of watering holes: to bring people together in cozy, merry settings.

Whether you're sipping a vodka-laden Geltini at Reboot's Hanukkah Pop-Up in San Francisco or an aquavit-based Christmas Carol Barrel at Miracle, a holiday-only bar at San Jose's Paper Plane, this is the season to get festive with ugly sweaters, fanciful drinking vessels and Santa-on-steroids decor.

Miracle started the trend in 2014, with its flagship pop-up in New York City. It has since grown to 80 locations around the world, including four in Northern Cali-

Top left: A Sippin' Santa gets a little smoky touch at Miracle.

Top right: Deck the Halls' Pecan Flip is made with Anchor Steam Christmas Ale and pecan orgeat.

Right: The cocktail pop up Miracle offers several Christmas-themed cocktails, including Fa La La La La, La La La La, made with gin, aquavit and cardamom vanilla syrup.

fornia. Founder Greg Boehm says the pop-up was inspired by the cozy, retro Christmas festivities he grew up with.

"To me, there's nothing more hygge than bringing good friends together and drinking mulled wine or other holiday cocktails,"

Boehm says. "We're all about slowing down and spending quality time getting to know each other. The idea is to transport you from whatever week you're having to a winter wonderland."

At the San Francisco-only Deck the Halls, which has new





digs near Polk Street this year, it's all about making sure everyone feels at home. "The point is to have something for everyone's taste, whether it's a Christmas or Hanukkah cocktail," says producer and mixologist Shaher Misif, "and enjoy the spirit of it all, rather than the hustle and bustle of shopping for presents."

Tanya Schevitz of Reboot agrees. "Hanukkah is not only eight days of a festival of lights, but is also embedded in our culture as a time to share experiences and memories with family and loved ones," she says. "It is the act of being together that really represents what the holiday is about."

Grab your gelt and get ready to sip nog from a gingerbread-house vessel. Here are some spots to get spirited over the holidays:

Whether it's Deck the Halls or Miracle, pictured, these mixology pop-ups sport Santa-on-steroids holiday decor.



Miracle

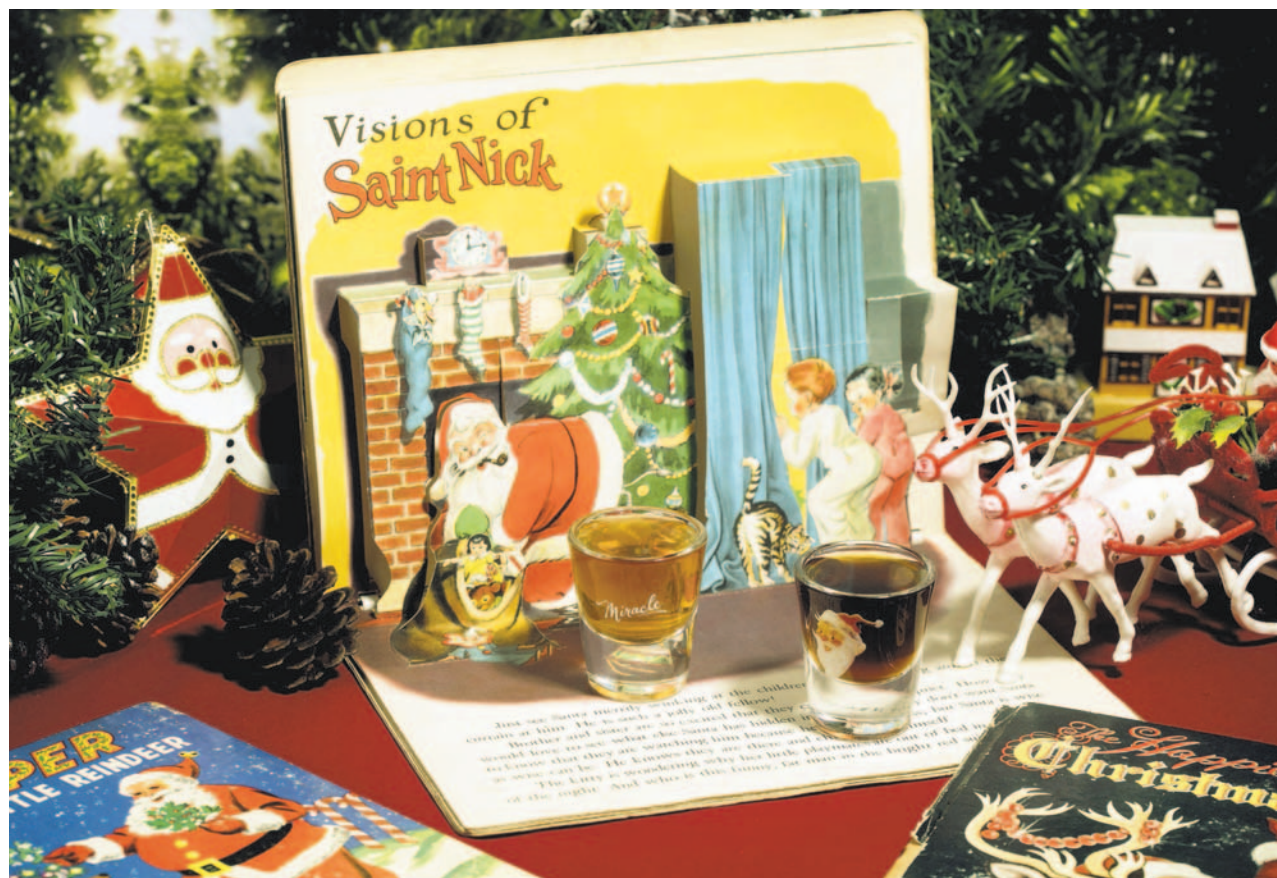
Miracle spread its cocktail cheer west to San Francisco last year for the first time, when it took over Union Square's Pacific Cocktail Haven. Miracle pop-ups are hyper-decorated, from the tinsel-topped presents dangling from ceilings and Santa hat-backed chairs to custom-made holiday-themed glassware. Look for Miracle favorites, like the Snowball Old Fashioned, made with gingerbread bourbon, wormwood bitters and lemon zest, to newcomers such as the rum-aquavit-amaro Christmas Carol Barrel and the And a Partridge in a Pear Tree, built on reposado tequila, pear brandy and spiced demerara syrup. Look for Miracle's new Sippin' Santa concept, complete with tiki-inspired cocktails — Kris Kringle Colada, anyone? — in Sacramento.

Details: Nov. 23 to Dec. 23 at Paper Plane, 72 S. First St., San Jose; Pacific Cocktail Haven, 580 Sutter St., San Francisco; The Red Rabbit Kitchen & Bar, 2718 J St., Sacramento; and Sippin Santa at Jungle Bird, 2516 J St., Sacramento; www.miraclepopup.com

Reboot Hanukkah Pop-Up

This annual pop-up is more gift shop and family-friendly hang-out than bar, but you can definitely get your drink on while scoring a “Twas the Night Before Hanukkah” CD or a pair of Jew Jitsu socks for that special someone. This year, in the non-profit's new San Francisco digs, the curated one-stop-shop will include a small bar where 21-and-over guests can sip a Geltini (\$8), made with vodka, coffee liqueur and chocolate milk, with a nosh — we vote challah or latke bites. Or you can walk around with your cocktail while taking in the riveting Great Hanukkah debate with author Ayelet Waldman, or a glow-in-the-dark Hanukkah dance party. Did we mention the LEGO menorah-building workshop for the kids?

Details: Nov. 29 to Dec. 3 at 214 Church St. in San Francisco. Visit www.rebooters.net/popup-shop.



BOTTOM: TANYA SCHEVITZ, LEFT: COURTESY OF MELISSA HOM



What better way to enjoy some warming shots than with a classic Christmas storybook inside the Miracle cocktail pop up?

Reboot's Geltini, made with vodka, coffee liqueur and chocolate milk, will be available starting Nov. 25 at the San Francisco Hanukkah pop up.

Deck the Halls

The edible mini-gingerbread houses — made by Boys & Girls Clubs kids, awww — and cranberry negronis served in Christmas ornaments were the biggest draws at last year's Deck the Halls. Misif may bring them back, along with other popular cocktails, including the flaming Pecan Flip, made with cachaça, pecan orgeat and sherry. Expect 12 to 15 cocktails in all, priced around \$12 each. Look for a secret Dreidel Bar, in addition to tucked-away corners with entertainers — carolers, perhaps, or a pianist — that lend themselves to gatherings. Last year's pop-up was decorated with an Instagram-worthy penguin and light installation. This year, you might find Krampus behind the bar.

Details: Nov. 23 to Dec. 31 at 1217 Sutter St., San Francisco; www.dthbar.com.

Latkes, brisket, challah and a crisp green salad round out the menu at Leslie Jonath's annual Vodka and Latke Party, which she describes in the new "Feed Your People" cookbook from Powerhouse publishing company.





FEAST

VODKA meets LATKES

*A food and drink
party becomes
a tradition*

BY AMBER TURPIN

San Francisco food writer Leslie Jonath knows all about feeding a crowd. Every year, her family hosts what has come to be known as The Vodka and Latke Party. It started out small — just immediate family — but soon grew into a huge event, a tradition that the Jonath family and 80 friends look forward to each year for their yearly dose of piping hot latkes, well-chilled vodka, briny pickles and utter conviviality.

Now, with a new book out — “Feed Your People: Big-Batch, Big-Hearted Cooking and Recipes to Gather Around” (Powerhouse Books, \$40), produced in tandem with the city’s 18 Reasons culinary community and dishes from a who’s who of the Bay Area gastronomy scene, from Alice Waters to Tanya Holland and Preeti Mistry — Jonath sat down to chat about feasts, fests and latkes.

PHOTOS COURTESY MOLLY DECOURCEAUX



Q: What inspired “Feed Your People”?

A: Throwing the Vodka and Latke party year after year has taught me a few tricks about cooking for a crowd. The number one rule is “don’t go at it alone.” Find your team and turn the preparation into a party. In the case of the latke party, my team has been my mother, who makes the latkes, my friend Anya (Fernald), who makes all the brisket, and my dad, who leads the vodka shots with pickle chasers. It is a delicious gathering, but as much as everyone loves the food, the act of coming together

Suzanne Jonath and her daughter Leslie throw a Vodka and Latke Party every year. Jonath shares the details in her new “Feed Your People” cookbook from Powerhouse publishing company.

around the food is what makes it special.

This led me to wonder more deeply about foods that bring people together. All over the world, people gather together around different foods for all kinds of reasons, from soup swaps, dumpling dinners, backyard barbecues, seafood boils to ice cream socials. People cook for each other for Sunday suppers, birthdays, holidays, memorials, fundraisers and so much more. I have always loved big, festive, inclusive gatherings and the big-hearted chefs who cook to bring community together.

As a cookbook editor, I searched for a book that provided recipes and strategies to cook for a crowd with recipes for show-stoppers and go-to dishes that could feed a crowd. Then I reached out to my network of wonderful, generous chefs who kindly offered their recipes. I partnered with 18 Reasons, a beloved Bay Area nonprofit cooking school that hosts community dinners and Cooking Matters classes for low-income families. We tested the recipes at Feed your People dinners and fed our community.

Q: How do you feed your people?

A: The vodka and latke ritual is our main yearly event. I love to help others cook and gather wherever I am. It doesn't always have to be a big event, either. One essential way I love to feed my people is by cooking an extra batch to bring to people who need extra comfort. Often, I will make a big batch of soup — most often chicken soup or seasonal minestrone — to bring to friends who might feel under the weather or need a little extra care.

Q: We're obsessed with your Latke and Vodka party. How did it start?

A: My father had a Russian friend in graduate school who taught him and my mother how to do vodka shots with pickle chasers. I was too young at the time to appreciate this ritual, but as an adult, I began integrating

Suzanne administers the spatula transfer to the latke plate under the approval of her daughter and collaborator, Leslie.

There's a technique to doing Russian-style vodka shots — and it involves pickles, says Leslie Jonath.



this ritual into our Hanukkah celebration, along with latkes. Then my mother figured out how to make the latkes ahead of time in batches and freeze (them). Making the latkes ahead of time and baking them off allowed her to make enough to feed a crowd: Also, no frying smell, and she could enjoy the party! Then I met Anya — who started the Eat Real Festival and is now CEO of Belcampo — and she made the meat, usually brisket. Then other friends brought cookies and more vodka, and the party grew into a bash.

Q: How does the party generally run?

A: First, you need to chill the vodka and gather an assortment of pickles — we love dill and cornichons. Chill the pickles, too. My dad leads the first few shots.

We usually put out the spread of main dish meats, so people can start noshing before the latkes come out. This includes some sort of meat like brisket — we did beef cheeks one year — and a salad with a crunchy lettuce, like Little Gems with a tarragon dressing.

My mom and dad bring the latkes in a cooler. My mom packages them in resealable bags and then lets them defrost on cookies sheets for 15 minutes before baking them in a 450-degree oven until they are hot and crispy.

For latke toppings, we have applesauce and sour cream. We aren't kosher, but we do have meat, so people need to be mindful about what choices they make. We also put out smoked salmon and salmon roe for non-meat eaters.

For dessert, I love Claudia Roden's famous Orange Almond Cake, which is in the book and so easy to make! Or friends will bring cookies.

Q: Wait a sec, there's a vodka shot technique?

A: My father greets people at the



door and leads the first shots to teach people how to do it the Russian way: First you exhale. Then take the shot. Then inhale while eating the pickle. The combined vapors of the vodka and the pickle will start your year off right!

We sometimes toast before, but mostly we exclaim after. Something like WOW! Or "That's what I'm talking about!"

Q: Any other tips so we can host a Vodka & Latke party, too?

A: Gather your team. Make the party planning and prep fun with two to three good friends who love to cook. Chose recipes that you delegate or make ahead. Make a big-batch of one central dish. And have your friends bring the drinks or desserts.

Latkes & Brisket how-tos

The Jonath family's huge annual Vodka & Latke Party relies on a few simple tricks: Do-ahead latkes and a communal approach to the dinner, in this case a big wine-braised brisket, courtesy of Oakland's Eat Real Festival founder and Belcampo CEO Anya Fernald, and desserts provided by guests.

Leslie Jonath, author of the new "Feed Your People" (Powerhouse Books, \$40), and her mother Suzanne begin the prep work well ahead of time. "Suzanne is a strong advocate of the freeze-ahead method for latkes," Leslie explains in the book. "She makes one 50-latke batch at a time, freezes them and then reheats them in the oven the day of the party."

Fifty latkes may sound like a lot, but each guest will likely eat four to six, topped with applesauce, sour cream or other toppings. So double this latke recipe to serve 10 to 12 people. One more tip: As anyone who has ever worked with potatoes can tell you, grated potatoes turn an unpleasant shade of gray very quickly. The crushed vitamin C tablet in this recipe helps prevent that.

The "Feed Your People" brisket recipe, which also appears in Anya Fernald's "Home Cooked" cookbook, can be made ahead, too. Both the brisket and braising liquid can be refrigerated, covered, for up to two days, or frozen — unsliced — for up to two months.

"I love to serve brisket," Fernald says, "because it's a relatively affordable cut that, when braised, turns out to be a delicious, inexpensive main dish."

And it's perfect with latkes.

— JACKIE BURRELL



PHOTOS COURTESY MOLLY DECOUDREAUX

Anya Fernald's Wine-Braised Brisket

Serves 6

Ingredients:

5 pound first-cut beef brisket
Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper
1 large red onion, cut into 8 wedges
2 fresh rosemary sprigs
2 cloves
4 juniper berries
1 teaspoon black peppercorns
750-ml bottle hearty red wine

Directions:

Heat the oven to 300 degrees. If necessary, trim the fat cap on the brisket to about ¼-inch thick. Generously season both sides with salt and pepper.

Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat. When the pan is very hot, add the brisket, fat side down, and sear until deep golden brown,

Brisket is a crowd-pleasing entree for any party.

5 to 6 minutes. Flip the brisket and sear the second side until brown, 5 to 6 minutes. (If the brisket is too large for your largest skillet, brown the brisket in a roasting pan spanning two burners.)

Transfer the brisket to a large roasting pan. Add the onions, rosemary, cloves, juniper berries and peppercorns. Pour in the wine, then add water as needed for the liquid to reach halfway up the size of the brisket. Tightly cover the pan with aluminum foil, and place in hot oven.

Braise until the brisket is fork-tender but not falling apart, 3 to 3½ hours. Remove from oven.

Carefully transfer the brisket to a sheet pan. Increase the oven temperature to 375 degrees. When the oven has reached temperature, place the sheet pan in the oven and bake until a dark brown crust begins to form on the

meat, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, pour the braising liquid through a fine-mesh sieve into a clear measuring cup; discard the solids. Using a large spoon, skim off and discard any fat from the surface. If the braising liquid is not as reduced as you would like, transfer it to a saucepan, bring it to a boil over medium heat, and boil it until the liquid has reduced and thickened. Season with salt and pepper.

When the brisket is ready, transfer it to a cutting board and cut it against the grain into ½-inch thick slices. Arrange the slices on a platter and spoon some of the braising liquid on top. Pour the remaining liquid into a pitcher or bowl to serve on the side.

— Excerpted from "Feed Your People: Big-Batch, Big-Hearted Cooking and Recipes to Gather Around" by Leslie Jonath with 18 Reasons, Powerhouse Books, 2018.

Suzanne Jonath’s Potato Latkes

Makes 25 pancakes

Ingredients:

- 1 tablet vitamin C
- 2 tablespoons boiling water
- 2½ pounds russet baking potatoes
- 1 yellow onion, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons matzo meal
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- Canola oil, for frying
- Sour cream, applesauce for serving

Directions:

Crush the vitamin C tablet to a powder, using a mortar and pestle or on a cutting board with a heavy saucepan. (The acid in the vitamin C is used here to prevent the potatoes from browning.) Transfer to a small heatproof bowl and stir in the boiling water. Let cool.

Peel the potatoes and cut into 2-inch pieces. Fit your food processor with the shredding attachment and, working in batches, shred the

potatoes. Remove the shredded potatoes from the bowl and fit the processor with the blade attachment. Again working in batches, return the shredded potatoes to the bowl and pulse until they are the size of rice grains. Transfer the finely chopped potatoes to a large bowl (or two bowls if making a double batch), add the vitamin C mixture and toss to combine.

Let the potato mixture stand for about 10 minutes until some liquid is released and the starch has settled into a thick paste at the bottom. Drain off the liquid, leaving behind the starch at the bottom. Stir the starch back into the potatoes, mixing well.

Fit the processor with the shredding attachment and shred the onions. Remove the onions from the bowl and fit the processor with the blade attachment. Return the shredded onions to the bowl and pulse until they are the size of rice grains. Add the onions to the potato mixture along with the matzo meal, eggs, salt and baking powder, and stir until incorporated.

Crispy potato pancakes or latkes are a beloved part of Hanukkah celebrations.

Line two half-sheet pans with a double thickness of paper towels. If serving the latkes immediately, position racks in the top third and center of the oven and heat to 200 degrees. Have two additional sheet pans ready for the oven.

Heat two large skillets over medium-high heat. Pour oil into the skillets to a depth of ¼ to ½ inch and heat until hot, but not shimmering. (Suzanne’s trick for checking the temperature is to put the end of a wooden chopstick in the oil; if bubbles quickly form around the tip, the oil is ready.) Using a soup spoon and allowing about 2 generous tablespoons per pancake, spoon the potato mixture into the hot oil. If you see liquid in the spoon as you scoop, drain the liquid back into the bowl from the spoon before adding the potato mixture to the oil. Do not crowd the pan or the latkes will give off too much steam, inhibiting crisping. Flatten the cakes slightly with the back of the spoon, then fry, turning once, until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes on each side. Using a spatula, transfer the latkes

to a paper towel-lined sheet pan to drain for a couple of minutes, keeping them in a single layer. Then move the latkes to an unlined sheet pan and keep warm in the oven for up to hour.

Repeat with remaining potato mixture, replenishing the oil as needed to maintain the same depth throughout cooking and bringing the oil back up to temperature between batches. Use a wire skimmer or slotted spoon to remove any burned bits from the oil before adding a new batch. Serve the latkes warm with sour cream and applesauce on the side.

To make ahead: Let the latkes cool completely, then freeze them in a single layer until solid, about 1 hour. Transfer them to zip-top freezer bags, separating the latkes with parchment paper, and freeze for up to three months. When ready to serve, heat oven to 450 degrees. Arrange latkes in a single layer on half-sheet pans and thaw at room temperature for about 15 minutes, then bake until sizzling and crisp, 5 to 10 minutes (or 15 to 20 minutes, if you don’t have time to thaw them).



GETTY IMAGES



TOP: GETTY IMAGES, BELOW: WHOLE FOODS.

Let the latkes be tasty takeout this holiday

On Hanukkah, we light the menorah, play dreidel and give small gifts to children for each of the eight nights. But what we really look forward to is feasting on latkes.

Of course, achieving the crisp corners and soft centers of a perfect potato pancake is not easy, especially when you've got a brisket braising in the oven and menorah cookies cooling on a rack.

Market Hall Foods offers many Hanukkah treats to-go.



To that we say — why not just order them? A prized few Bay Area restaurants and markets will do the shredding, squeezing and frying for you. Pick them up before your Hanukkah party and relish the clean (read: not grease-laden) kitchen for eight amazing nights.

This year, Hanukkah begins on Dec. 3, and all three spots listed below are making other parts of the Hanukkah meal, too, from Star of David sugar cookies to slow-cooked brisket. Here they are:

Saul's Restaurant & Delicatessen

Every year, owner Peter Levitt's latkes (last year, they were \$15 for a half dozen; \$29 dozen) take center stage at the Latke Tent & Beer Garden just outside the Berkeley restaurant. In addition to the perfectly crafted potato pancakes — Levitt's recipe achieves crispiness by using the russets' natural starch instead of flour or matzoh meal — Saul's Delicatessen also offers other Hanukkah must-haves, from homemade apple sauce, chicken soup and matzoh balls to braised brisket and sufganiyot.

Details: 1475 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley; www.saulsdeli.com

Wise Sons Jewish Delicatessen

San Francisco's premier stop for all things bagel and schmear is offering the key dishes for this year's Festival of Lights. Not just fried potato pancakes (\$32 a dozen), cooked to a crisp in cast iron and served with sides ranging from rustic apple sauce to smoked fish salad, but also babka platters, matzoh ball soup and sweet noodle kugel with raisin and cornflake topping (which is probably better than your Bubbe's).

Details: Find Wise Sons' San Francisco and Larkspur locations at <http://wisesonsdeli.com>.

Market Hall Foods

The fine foodies at Market Hall



COURTESY MOLLY DECOUDREAUX

never disappoint with their classic, shredded spuds. Generously sized, golden potato pancakes (4 for \$6.95) are cooked to perfection and ready to heat. Top with their cinnamon-kissed apple sauce (\$9.95 pint) and house-made creme fraiche (\$3.95 for 5 ounces), of course. Also look for

Whole Foods' Hanukkah Dinner to-go, which includes a juicy brisket with root vegetables, is another option.

rugelach, savory vegetable kugel and roasted yam puree studded with gingery pears.

Details: Order online, by phone or in-person at both locations, in Oakland or Berkeley; www.markethallfoods.com.

— JESSICA YADEGARAN



12 Days of Houseguests

STORY BY JESSICA YADEGARAN AND LINDA ZAVORAL

ILLUSTRATION BY GINA TRIPLETT AND MATT CURTIUS

Thanksgiving and the winter holidays bring houseguest season. You've prepared your home for coziness and celebrations. Now it's time to show those loved ones from near and far why we love the Bay Area so much.

Here are 12 places to send those houseguests frolicking, from three one-of-a-kind museums to two interactive sweet-tooth experiences. And not a single partridge in a pear tree.

1 **Munro at Montalvo: Stories in Light**

Put simply, British artist Bruce Munro is to light bulbs what Christo was to fabric fences. But we think electrical masterpieces are way more awesome than acres of orange fabric. The Montalvo Arts Center has scored Munro's first West Coast exhibition, and it's one inspired by the "Chronicles of Narnia." His "Stories in Light" show will illuminate Montalvo's 175 acres in Saratoga through March 2019. You can view it on your own, join Family Night activities or dine in the 1912 villa before exploring.

Details: Exhibition prices start at \$20; dates and times vary. 15400 Montalvo Road, Saratoga; www.montalvoarts.org

Film festivals, museums, gardens and more — the Bay Area has a wealth of activities to entertain your visiting guests... and you just might find a few adventures you have missed.

2 **Rosie the Riveter Historical Park**

Take your red polka-dot bandana and head to Richmond! Plenty of U.S. museums explore America's war history through the military lens. But this gem on the East Bay waterfront delves into what was happening on the home front during World War II, particularly the role-changing efforts of "Rosie the Riveter," the women who kept the factories humming. Learn about victory gardens and rationing campaigns, too. (And if you don't have a Rosie bandana, you can buy one in the gift shop.) Nearby is the SS Red Oak Victory, a ship-turned-museum.

Details: Open daily (except holidays) at 1414 S. Harbour Way, Richmond. Check www.rosietheriveter.org for special events with WWII docents. The Red Oak Victory is at 1337 Canal Blvd.; www.redoakvictory.us

3 **Museum of Ice Cream**

Half a million visitors from 65 countries agree: San Francisco's Museum of Ice Cream is a must-experience. Your houseguests will love eating ice cream, wading in a pool of rainbow sprinkles, climbing a pink rock-candy wall and playing ring-toss with whipped cream cans. And that's just the first scoop of what awaits them at this internationally lauded theme parklike exhibit, which has found its permanent home in San Francisco. Best part? The museum has new installations planned for 2019, so you can take your guests twice.

Details: Purchase tickets (\$38) at www.museumoficecream.com. Find the museum at 1 Grant Ave., San Francisco.

4 Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum

You don't have to be a Laurel and Hardy film buff to appreciate the treasures inside this East Bay museum. Beyond the vintage posters and artifacts, you'll find a plethora of information on all facets of silent filmmaking, from planning and production to editing and presentation. View a flick made in Niles by Charlie Chaplin and Broncho Billy Anderson, catch a weekend silent-film screening and tour the Edison Theatre, circa 1913, including the original tin-lined projection booth. Did we mention Niles is a mecca for antiquing, too?

Details: \$7 suggested donation. Open weekends at 37417 Niles Blvd., Fremont; <http://niles-filmmuseum.org>

5 Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum

Home to the largest collection of Egyptian artifacts in western North America, this museum features a peek inside daily life, marriage, religion and after-life rituals of the Egyptians, from the Neolithic period to today. Learn about pyramids and temples, see rare mummified animals and a composite replica of a Middle Kingdom monarch's tomb. Don't miss the Alchemy Exhibit, the first of its kind in the U.S., which features the seven stages of the alchemical process, a meditation chamber and a full-size reproduction of an alchemist's workshop.

Details: \$9. Open Wednesday-Sunday at 1660 Park Ave., San Jose; <https://egyptianmuseum.org>.

Top: Liv 8, Leila 10, and Larissa Gorton, 12, of Reno, pose for photos dressed as Rosie the Riveter during the 2017 3rd annual Rosie Rally at Craneway Pavilion in Richmond.

6 Livermore wine country How would you like to zip through wine country, going from tasting room to tasting room, instead of sitting in an endless line of traffic? You can — in Livermore's wine country. And chances are high that your out-of-state relatives don't even know about this laid-back valley, which offers a rich grape-growing history that dates back to the 1880s. Today it's home to about 50 wineries — and wine trolley tours. The back roads and rolling hills provide lovely views between sips, and downtown's First Street is lined with restaurants. For a fun break, head to Campo di Bocce for a spirited game of bocce. You can arrange to have a glass of sauvignon blanc sitting courtside for you.

Details: Check the website of the Livermore Valley Winegrowers Association, www.lvwine.org, for tasting room hours. Find Campo di Bocce details at www.campodibocce.com and wine trolley information at <https://livermorewinetrolley.com>.

7 Computer History Museum

Calling all nerds! You may think your guests are visiting Silicon Valley for your holiday stuffing, but we know better. They're here to see the evolution of computing, from the abacus to the smartphone in a one-of-a-kind 25,000-square-foot exhibition featuring 19 galleries, 1,100 objects and an array of multimedia experiences. Fly through World of Warcraft's Azeroth. Speed-text to victory in "Make Software: Change the World" and travel back in time to 1959 in a re-creation of a working business computer center in the IBM 1401 Demo Lab. You can even play a round of Pong.

Details: \$6-\$17.50. Open Wednesday-Sunday at 1401 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View; www.computerhistory.org.



RAY CHAVEZ; DAI SUGANO; KARL MONDON/SATAFF ARCHIVES



8 Midcentury modern in Oakland

OK, the “World of Charles and Ray Eames” exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California really should be titled “They Invented Cool.” You may not know the names of Charles and Ray Eames, but you’ll recognize their chair and other contributions to the midcentury-modern worlds of architecture, furniture, fashion and film. This married couple (Ray was a she, a Sacramento native) has been hailed as two of the 20th century’s most influential designers, and this exhibit offers a fascinating romp through their world. You’ll never look at furniture the same way again. The exhibit runs through Feb. 17, 2019.

Details: Tickets, \$19.95 general, \$14.95 senior/student. Open Wednesday-Sunday at 1000 Oak St., Oakland; www.museumca.org

9 Pier 39

There is so much to do at Fisherman’s Wharf, your guests won’t know where to start. Here are two under-the-radar options at Pier 39: Take a dizzying stroll through the arched doorways and colorful columns of the zany Magowan’s Infinite Hall of Mirrors (\$5; Building O, Level 2) without getting turned around, then re-create your first piano recital — or “Chopsticks,” we won’t judge — on the three-octave musical stairs designed by Remo Saraceni. Each stair has a motion sensor that corresponds to a piano note. When you cross the motion-sensor beam, it plays the note.

Details: Most attractions open at 10 a.m. daily. Located at Beach Street and The Embarcadero in San Francisco; www.pier39.com

10 Candytopia

This interactive candy exhibit, located across the street from the Museum of Ice Cream, features a dozen rooms filled with massive sculptures, portraits and paintings made entirely out of jelly beans, gummy bears, licorice, gum drops, rock candy and other nostalgic sweets. The best part? Each piece is covered in shellac to preserve and

Middle: Plastic lawn flamingos glow under colored flood lights during a preview screening of “Stories in Light”, an illuminated display of Bruce Munro’s work at the Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga
Bottom: Visitors play in a pool of make-believe marshmallows inside Candytopia.

protect it, so you and the kids are welcome to touch everything. And dive into a vat of 250,000 foam marshmallows. ‘Gram much?

Details: \$26-\$34. Through Jan. 6 at 767 Market St., San Francisco; www.candytopia.com.

11 Ruth Bancroft Garden & Nursery

Renowned California gardener Ruth Bancroft, an early proponent of drought-tolerant plants, left a 3.5-acre legacy when she died last year. She had filled her family’s former orchard in the heart of Walnut Creek with rare and beautiful succulents and cacti — the world’s largest such collection. Every season brings new blooms, so fall and winter are terrific times to visit. Consider this a refreshing break for your guests — and they might even find enough inspiration to head home and transform their garden.

Details: Admission, \$8-\$10. The garden is open Tuesday-Sunday (closed holidays and the day after Thanksgiving) at 1552 Bancroft Road, Walnut Creek; www.ruthbancroftgarden.org.

12 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

Finally, if your crowd is a little bah-humbug when it comes to holiday traditions, we’ve got an idea. How about riding the Loooff Carousel, playing skee-ball and eating corn dogs on Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Year’s? The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is one of the few Northern California attractions open on holidays, although the Giant Dipper coaster often takes the day off. But the Casino Arcade and Neptune’s Kingdom are always open, and — weather permitting — some Boardwalk rides will be, too. If your house guests are visiting from a landlocked state, a trip to the ocean may be the best holiday present of all.

Details: Boardwalk admission is free; rides, games extra. 400 Beach St., Santa Cruz; www.beachboardwalk.com



TAHOE

AFTER DARK

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

When the sun goes down, and you've had your fill of tearing up the snow, take the gondola to the base of the mountain and find Tahoe's top spots for post-slope partying.



APRÈS SKI



SQUAW VALLEY RESORT

After the slopes, it's time to bond with friends over drinks and casual bites by a toasty fire

We can thank Norway, France, Austria and Switzerland for inventing and curating the culture of après ski, but it took us Americans to turn it into a real after-party. Après ski is the payoff after an exhilarating day of carving turns on powder or shredding gnarly terrain on your board. Or simply building a snowman near the bunny slope.

It means bonding with friends old and new at nearby restaurants and bars, over casual bites and warming drinks in front of a stone fireplace or around an outdoor fire pit. Breathe fresh mountain air mingled with the scent of fir, while live tunes play in the background. And trendy ski fashion is optional. (As one veteran après observer noted, "You'll see everything from diamonds to duct tape.")

And après ski also means snuggling with your sweetie in a romantic restaurant over fine fare and glasses of pinot noir.

This ski-weekend sampler from the Tahoe Basin will lift the altitude of your attitude, guaranteed.

How better to relax after a long day on the slopes but by a roaring fire in an outdoor fire pit?

Previous page: The Squaw Valley gondola gets in the spirit of the season every December.

Where to party

BLUE ANGEL CAFE, SOUTH LAKE TAHOE

Fifteen years ago, Blue Angel owners Jeff and Rosie Cowen were immersed in the après ski scene in Austria and Switzerland, where they learned the golden rule: "The success of the ski day doesn't depend on the mountain conditions as much as whom you get together with afterward and how good the food is," Jeff says. We opened this place based on that."

The result is a cozy hideaway with ski-lodge ambience on the main route for skiers leaving Heavenly Mountain Resort at day's end. It gets rockin'.

Best bites: Crisp-creamy, coconut-crusted tofu, beef Bourguignon made with braised tri-tip, a roasted veggie napoleon and cod-bacon chowder. The thinly battered fish 'n' chips is the best around the lake, thanks in part to the African piri piri peppers in the housemade Cajun spice mix. Blue Angel is known for its vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options, such as the mainstay carrot-coconut-ginger soup.

Best sips: Lose the chills in front of the stone fireplace with cups of hot, spiced Glühwein, or go sweet with a caramel-y Twinky Mocha. Choose from nine taps or better yet, a bottle of peanut butter milk stout.

Details: 1132 Ski Run Blvd., South Lake Tahoe; www.blueangelcafe.com

APRÈS SKI



THE RITZ-CARLTON

RIVA GRILL ON THE LAKE, SOUTH LAKE TAHOE

Take a close look at the polished mahogany host podium — it’s the bow of a speedboat, for real. Actually, the sprawling restaurant is themed around Italian yacht-builder Carlo Riva’s Aquarama speedboats, made from 1962 to 1996, and echoed in murals painted on the walls. The main dining room offers floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Lake Tahoe, but the better view is upstairs.

Head for the buzzing bar area to find a mountainous stone fireplace, après happy hour, live music and Fish Taco Fridays.

Best bites: Grilled or blackened snapper tacos are appropriately messy with apple-jicama slaw, guacamole, pico de gallo and

cilantro. Or share a wood-fired pizza or two.

Best sips: Riva’s trademark cocktail is the rum-based Wet Woody, but the Warm Woody — coffee, hot chocolate and Baileys Irish Cream liqueur — is the way to go at this time of year.

Details: 900 Ski Run Blvd., South Lake Tahoe; www.rivagrill.com

NORTHSTAR CALIFORNIA, TRUCKEE

Party Central happens at The Rink, a roundabout of restaurants, bars and shops with a 9,000-square-foot ice skating rink at its hub. It’s a spot to lounge, eat, drink and enjoy live music. The best seats are on the cushy sofas in the open-air “cabanas,” cozying

The stone-and-wood luxury castle Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe, Truckee is a short gondola ride above Northstar, with both après ski possibilities and a romantic five-star restaurant.

up in front of one of the many fire pits that light up Northstar’s three levels. For gooey fun, pick up s’mores kits at the Cabana and Rink bars and roast the treats in the flames.

Best bites: Frites specializes in crispy-creamy hand-crafted French fries, customized five ways. Grab a fork for the braised short-rib version.

Join the queue at the Euro Snack window for a hot, caramelized Belgian waffle or a tender salmon crepe. The go-to to-go item is an all-beef frankfurter nestled inside a crispy, hollowed-out baguette. We hear it has a cult following.

If you happen to be on top of Mt. Pluto (8,610 feet), ski into the Summit Smokehouse for

platters of low ‘n slow ‘cue. Dessert is the view.

Best sips: Hit Frites for craft brews, the Grille at Sawtooth Ridge for fine wines, and the Rink and Overlook bars for strawberry and blackberry shrubs. Dare to try a Dirty Snowman cocktail at the Cabana Bar.

Details: 5001 Northstar Drive, Truckee; www.northstarcalifornia.com

RITZ-CARLTON LAKE TAHOE, TRUCKEE

This stone-and-wood luxury castle is a short gondola ride above Northstar, with both après ski possibilities and a romantic five-star restaurant. Pause to admire the 55-foot-tall



granite fireplace, then exit into the Back Yard, a massive flagstone patio with a gather-round fire pit. (You can ski-in, ski-out from Northstar.) Check out the free Marshmology program, with housemade s'mores ready for toasting. Back inside, the upscale Manzanita is perfect for a quiet tête-à-tête.

Best bites: Grab 'n' go pulled pork, ribs and brisket at the Backyard Bar & BBQ kiosk.

At Manzanita, chef Mark Jeffers says he "loves reinventing classic dishes," such as "kicked-up" chicken pot pie finished with shaved truffles and an irresistible take on seafood Newburg. Simpler is the Truckee Reuben, stacked with both corned beef and pastrami.

Make reservations for an up-close-and-personal multicourse dinner at the Chef's Table or the more casual Chef's Tasting Counter, adjacent to Manzanita's theatrical open kitchen. Dialogue with the chef and staff is part of it.

Best sips: Manzanita holds multiple "distinguished wine list" awards from Wine Spectator magazine; choose from 2,800 bottles.

Details: 13031 Ritz Carlton Highlands Court, Truckee; www.ritzcarlton.com

VILLAGE AT SQUAW VALLEY

Squaw's entrenched ski culture was born during the 1960 Winter Olympics and still saturates the resort. Big-mountain skiers mingle with newbies at two hot spots, KT Base Bar, which offers live music, and Le Chamois.

KT Base Bar's ski-in, ski-out, fire pit-studded plaza lies beneath the KT-22 funitel, the only two-cable aerial ski lift in North America. The gondola ride up KT-22 (8,070 feet) is thrilling, but the action on the mountain turns into high-energy spectator sport on the patio, as expert skiers fly off cliffs and zoom down steep chutes.

Le Chamois (known to locals as "the Chammy") is all about pizza and homemade soup downstairs, where the crowd spills out on the patio, and beer upstairs in the Loft Bar, which is filled with ski memorabilia.

Best bites: Find casual fare at Wildflour Baking Co., where savvy locals know the real draw is owner Susan Lopez's from-scratch cookies. You might rub shoulders at the counter with alpine ski racer Julie Mancuso or freestyle skier Jonny Moseley, who are longtime regulars.

Nachos take on new dimension at the Rocker, where a mountain of tortilla chips is buried beneath an avalanche of fresh condiments, and you can add steak, chicken or pulled pork.

Best sips: KT Coffee at KT Base Bar blends Peet's brew with Sailor Jerry Rum and RumChata. Or lounge around the fire pit in the

intimate bar area of the upscale PlumpJack Cafe for craft cocktails, fine wines and small plates, such as poke cones.

Details: 1750 Village East Road, Olympic Valley; www.squawalpine.com

Where to cuddle

THE SAGE ROOM, STATELINE

Casino restaurants can be engineered to look classy and romantic, but the lovingly lit Sage Room at Harveys has been the gospel since 1947.

Love (or something like it) can blossom in a secluded booth with a view of the elegant main dining room—a stage, really, for a fascinating play in which you're the star and the impeccably attentive servers are the supporting cast. The Sage Room maintains the mostly lost fine-dining traditions of flambé and tableside preparation

Best bites: Go classic with tableside Caesar salad (served with frozen forks!) and oysters Rockefeller, then move to brandy-flambéed steak Diane and other rarely seen retros — beef Wellington, chateaubriand for two, veal Oscar and flambéed cherries jubilee.

Best sips: Try the hickory-smoked — at tableside, yet — Old Fashioned with Angel's Envy bourbon, housemade barrel-aged bitters and Luxardo cherries.

Details: 18 Highway 50, Stateline, Nevada; www.caesars.com/harveys-tahoe

CAFE FIORE, SOUTH LAKE TAHOE

This seven-table Italian restaurant is listed in the "Best Places to Kiss in Northern California" guide. You can practice at Table No. 4, in a remote corner next to a bay window.

Best bites: Start with grilled eggplant, thinly sliced and rolled around smoked salmon, then move on to piccata-style seared swordfish and house-made saffron fettuccine heavy with seafood.

Best sips: The 300-bottle wine list holds multiple Wine Spectator awards, and a Paso Robles red goes well with winter. Finish with glasses of port.

Details: 1169 Ski Run Blvd., South Lake Tahoe; www.cafefiore.com

Hot drinks are even more comforting enjoyed before a blazing fire.



6 holiday fests: Find festive fun on some snowy mountaintops

Ski runs and slaloms draw powderhounds to the slopes each winter. But those in the Sierra sparkle with more than simple snowflakes: Here are six holiday festivals to warm your spirits.

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE

Heavenly Holidays: This festival on the mountain features a 16-foot interactive show globe, where kids can get their photos taken with Santa, plus sleigh rides, ice sculptures, music and a New Year's celebration with an outdoor concert, a gondola "ball drop" and fireworks. Dec. 18-31, Heavenly Village. <https://bit.ly/2pK54Mk>

SnowGlobe Music Festival: This crazy-popular event offers three days of music, all sorts of wintry delights and a New Year's Eve celebration, too. Dozens of world-class musicians will appear on multiple stages, including Above & Beyond, Diplo, Eric Prydz, Rezz, RL Grime and Big Gigantic. Tickets are \$199-\$449. Dec. 29-31, Community Play Fields, 1 College Way, South Lake Tahoe; snowglobemusicfestival.com

It's not all about the snow in Tahoe... Reindeer games, musical acts and other jolly entertainment take center stage during Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows' Merry Days and Holly Nights.

NORTH LAKE TAHOE

Merry Days & Holly Nights: Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows celebrate the holidays in a variety of ways during the Merry Days fest, from a moonlit snowshoe tour and dinner to a "Twisted Nutcracker" dance spectacular. Plus train rides, Reindeer Games scavenger hunts, farm-to-table dinners and more. Dec. 14-31, squawalpine.com/holidays

New Year's Eve Celebration: Festivities at The Village at Northstar begin at 9 p.m. Enjoy fireworks, live music from Bay Area party band The Boombox, plus outdoor ice skating and cozy fire pits. Dec. 31; <https://bit.ly/2Po5B1C>

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN

Night of Lights: Welcome the holiday season with live music, a torchlight parade, kids activities, snowmobiles rides and fireworks. Plus photo ops with Santa and Woolly, food and drinks and a little magic, too. 4:30-8:30 p.m. Dec. 15 at Canyon Lodge. <https://bit.ly/2C6sGIQ>

New Year's Eve Fun and Fireworks: Ring in the new year with this family-friendly fest on the Gondola Deck with live music, a hot cocoa bar, face painting and a fireworks show. 6:30-9:30 p.m. Dec. 31; www.visitmammoth.com/events.

— LISA HERENDEN

DESTINATION

Ghirardelli



It's hip to be Square

*Ghirardelli's got
a brand new vibe*

BY JESSICA YADEGARAN

That bright golden sign. The scent of milk chocolate. And those stunning views of Alcatraz Island. People come from all around the world to walk through Ghirardelli Square and enjoy a cup of world-famous cocoa or ice cream, but you rarely heard the buzz of locals around the historic public square. Until now.

The 156-year-old San Francisco landmark is going through a major renaissance, with several new and singular destinations reviving it as a hot spot for eating, drinking and playing, from a cheese school and an award-winning brewery to a new Latin street-food eatery.

DESTINATION



"We wanted to create a savory experience to match the legendary sweet experience," says Michael Phillips, a Palo Alto native and president of Jamestown Properties, which purchased the retail portion of Ghirardelli Square in 2013. "Our goal was to restore the square to its roots as a culinary landmark and make it something San Franciscans can hopefully be proud of."

Oh, we're proud. Proud enough to take houseguests or even keep it all to ourselves, especially when the next big tenant moves in. By year's end, the family behind Koi Palace will open Palette, a family-friendly dim sum restaurant inside the former Waxman's Restaurant. We'll be gushing with pride between mouthfuls of to-die-for dumplings.

Until then, here are four of our favorite new spots for fun in Ghirardelli Square.

Lael Moreno looks awed by the variety of cheeses behind the glass counter at The Cheese School of San Francisco.

THE CHEESE SCHOOL OF SAN FRANCISCO

Located in the historic two-story building next to the iconic Ghirardelli arch, The Cheese School is a must-see destination for cheese buffs and the curd curious. In addition to hands-on classes — which include Cheese + Cider Pairings and Holiday Pizza Making — the brick-walled school features a beautiful, fine-casual cafe with rustic farmhouse seating nooks



overlooking the water and a cheese shop that'll do that mind-blown emoji thing to you.

This isn't an encyclopedic offering of cheese, but rather the best of the best, with an emphasis on the current artisanal domestic cheese movement. Looking for an amazing melter? A spreadable goat? A meaty Alpine? The selection changes often, but there are always 60 to 70 cheeses on offer, in addition to a highly curated selection of charcuterie and boutique wines under \$35. Grab-and-go salads

Fresh fruits, veggies and cured meats surround a tempting Brillat Savarin at The Cheese School.

and sandwiches are coming soon.

Until then, tuck into a cup of chunky tomato soup (\$8), slow cooked in a creamy, garlic-flecked Parmesan broth, and the flagship grilled cheese (\$11), loaded with Hook's 5-year Cheddar, Point Reyes Farmstead Toma and Nicasio Valley San Geronimo, ready for dipping. This is whey more than cheese — it's an experience.

Details: Open from 11 a.m. daily at 900 North Point St., San Francisco; <https://thecheese-school.com>.

DESTINATION



PHOTOS: RANDY VAZQUEZ/STAFF

SAN FRANCISCO BREWING CO. & RESTAURANT

Craft beer in Ghirardelli Square? Oh, yes. You've likely enjoyed San Francisco Brewing Co.'s Marina Blonde Ale or Lombard Lambic on tap at bars around the city, but now it's time to truly experience them. Located inside the historic Cocoa Building, this 12,000-square-foot brewery and restaurant is doing it all, from experimental beers — hello, single-batch Hibiscus Ale — to American-style pub fare and live music.

Behind the scenes at the San Francisco Brewing Company, the gleaming tanks, above, are generating the magic that will ultimately result in the ability to serve a foamy flight of beer, right.

Grab one of the red swivel stools around the bar, a counter-high four-top or a seat in the sunny beer garden and dip into brewmaster Justin Boehle's fresh, tank-to-tap beers, including seasonals (\$5-\$9) and on-trend suds such as the Hazy Valley IPA and a few culinary collaborations, like Not Yo' Mama's French Toast, a marzen infused with Vermont maple syrup, vanilla beans, cinnamon and star anise served with a sugared rim.

The menu is simple and comfort-food in focus, with typical





bar-food starters (\$6-\$12) like onion rings and spicy wings, shareable pizzas (\$15-\$18) and entrees (\$14-\$15), such as macaroni and cheese and mahi mahi tacos. Happy beering.

Details: Open from 11 a.m. daily at 3150 Polk St.; <https://sf-brewingco.com>

PICO LATIN STREET FOOD

You'll find this new fast-casual eatery inside the former Lori's Diner space next to The Cheese School. White subway tiles and handsome earth-toned booths have replaced the neon signs and red leather diner chairs. And instead of burgers and fries, you'll find a comprehensive menu of Latin American favorites, from pupusas (two for \$13) and tortas (\$13-\$17) to street tacos (two for \$12-\$14).



Top photos: The new Subpar Miniature Golf Course in Ghirardelli Square honors San Francisco landmarks such as the Painted Ladies townhouses, above, and the Golden Gate Park windmill, right, at each of its 18 holes.

Bottom photos: Tasty pupusas and third-queenching aguas frescas are among the offerings at Pico Latin Street Food.



Among our favorites: Del Mar Pacific Rock Cod tacos (\$13) a la plancha style with cilantro-lime slaw, guacamole and hot sauce. The Poblano Quinoa Bowl (\$13) is impressive, too, and loaded with wild arugula, roasted red peppers, black beans, avocado and charred poblano chiles. If you're craving pupusas, go for the Revuelta Traditional, thick corn tortillas stuffed with a combo of pork, cheese and beans and topped with curtido, or spicy cabbage slaw, flecked with papaya. Yum.

Details: Open from 11:30 a.m. weekdays and from 10 a.m. weekends at 900 North Point St.; <https://picosf.com>

SUPPAR MINIATURE GOLF

This beloved indoor miniature golf course will close its doors in

Alameda this month — but Alameda's loss is Ghirardelli Square's gain. Subpar is located on the lower level, just across from the



arcade, offering a family-friendly night out. The picture-perfect views of Alcatraz Island aren't too shabby, either.

Inside, each of the 18 putt-putt holes depicts a mini version of a Bay Area landmark — the Golden Gate Bridge, Coit Tower, the Castro Theater — handmade by owner Michael Taft and other local designers, including his dad. Looking for a challenge? Try glow-in-the-dark golfing on Friday and Saturday nights. Subpar offers golf-course bites (\$3.50-\$14.50), including corn dogs and sandwiches, and a dozen beers on tap (\$5-\$8).

Details: One round (18 holes) is \$12 for adults, \$8 for kids. Open from 11 a.m. Monday-Thursday and from 10 a.m. Friday-Sunday at 900 North Point St.; <https://subparminigolf.com>

DESTINATION

RIGHT: JACKIE BURRELL/STAFF. FAR RIGHT BLUE MERMAID



Where to chowder down on Fisherman's Wharf

Sure, San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf is thronged with out-of-towners. But in the midst of all that hustle and bustle, the "I escaped from Alcatraz" T-shirt shops and tourist tchotchkes, are local treasures. Among them, four casual eateries that boast both history and tasty fare.

1 BUENA VISTA

San Franciscans have flocked to this historic saloon near the Powell-Hyde cable car's last stop since 1916. They serve food here, too, of course — and the omelets are huge — but the Buena Vista is famous for its Irish coffee. Owner Jack Koeppler and San Francisco Chronicle columnist Stanton Delaplane created the recipe here in 1952. Today, the bar serves

some 2,000 Irish coffees per day. Yours could make it 2,001.

Details: Open from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. daily and 8 a.m. on weekends, at 2765 Hyde St., San Francisco; www.thebuenavista.com.

2 CAPURRO'S

All the big Fisherman's Wharf names are tied to this winsome Sicilian restaurant, tucked inside a bright red building near Hyde Street Pier. The F. Alioto Lazio Fish Co., which Frank Alioto opened with his cousin Tom Lazio in 1941, is two doors down. And Frank's son Mario began serving fresh seafood and tasty Italian fare at Capurro's right after World War II. Today, it's still one of only a few wharf restaurants allowed to buy fish right off the boats. (Psst, be

sure to check out the historical photographs on the walls.)

Details: Open daily from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. at 498 Jefferson St.; <http://capurros.com>

3 BOUDIN BISTRO

Yes, chowder bread bowls are a bit touristy — and there are now Boudins scattered across the Bay Area. But this is the flagship, built in 2005 with a production bakery and Boudin history museum on the lower level and a full-service restaurant with bay views upstairs. Boudin's bakers have been making their signature sourdough bread in San Francisco since 1849, each loaf infused with some of the original Mother Lode mother dough from those Gold Rush days. This is the place to order that bowl.

The seafood comes fresh off the boat at Capurro's, left, and the Blue Mermaid, above, serves up three kinds of chowder.

Details: Open daily 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. and until 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday at 160 Jefferson St.; www.bistroboudin.com.

4 BLUE MERMAID

This recently renovated restaurant's nautical decor — rough-hewn timbers, exposed brick and mermaid artwork — and historical setting are irresistible. It's part of the boutique Argonaut Hotel, housed in the 1909 Haslett Warehouse and now part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. Service can be a bit hit or miss, but the seafood is fresh, and there are three kinds of chowder.

Details: Open daily from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., until 10:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, at 495 Jefferson St.; bluemermaidsf.com.

— JACKIE BURRELL

Hook, line and sinker: It's a tourist treasure, but locals dig it, too

Now don't give me the whole "locals don't do Fisherman's Wharf" thing. You know you secretly love the touristy stuff as much as your vacationing cousin from Poughkeepsie does. So even if he's not visiting, it's perfectly OK to grab a bowl o' chowder and enjoy the classic fun on your own.

Here are some must-do, must-see spots along the main drag of Jefferson Street:

1 HISTORIC SEAFOOD STANDS

The bay side of Jefferson is the more-or-less authentic Fisherman's Wharf, what with all the, well, fishermen. Breathe in the smell of fresh fish and sea breeze, watch shivers of light dance across the hulls of small fishing boats and wander the sidewalk seafood stands with their vats of live crab and seafood cocktails — with classic cocktail sauce, of course — and bowls of clam chowder, fried seafood and shrimp-sal-

ad sandwiches.

Details: www.visitfishermanswharf.com/seafood-stands/

2 MUSEE MECHANIQUE

Get taunted by a bawdy Laughing Sal, spin a toothpick Ferris wheel, have your fortune told or play the French Execution booth, where little mechanical dolls behead other little mechanical dolls. It's all in good fun at the Musee, a collection of more than 300 vintage, coin-operated mechanical musical instruments and antique arcade machines in original working condition. You can actually play them for, like, a quarter (fear not, they have change machines), and admission is free.

Details: Pier 45 at the foot of Taylor Street, www.museemechaniquesf.com.

3 SEA LIONS

Not long after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake shook things up, boisterous and oft-odorif-

Be sure to check out the Maritime History museum and don't forget to watch the sea lions at Pier 39's K-dock.

erous pinnipeds — a.k.a. sea lions — laid claim to the docks at Pier 39's K-Dock as their official sunbathing turf. Each winter, the population increases to nearly 900 sea lions, drawing crowds of camera-bearing humans as they lounge and occasionally lunge at each other (the sea lions, not the humans, that is). Get a sneak peek via the sea lion webcam at www.pier39.com/the-sea-lion-story/sea-lion-webcam/.

4 WAX MUSEUM & DUNGEON

Get up close and almost personal with everyone from Michael Jackson and Leonardo di Caprio to Grumpy Cat and Groot in their wonderful wax likenesses at Madame Tussauds wax museum, which now includes an escape room and a virtual-reality experience as well as the famous statues. Then head next door to the San Francisco Dungeon, an immersive actor-led attraction

through the city's dark past. You'll encounter ghosts of grizzled Gold Rush prospectors, Barbary Coast baddies and Alcatraz inmates.

Details: Tickets for the individual attractions start at \$25; Madame Tussauds and Dungeon packages start at \$30. Both at 145 Jefferson St.; www.madametussauds.com/san-francisco, www.thedungeons.com/san-francisco.

5 MARITIME HISTORY

Just across from Ghirardelli Square, check out the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, where you can tour the historic ships docked at Hyde Street Pier, such as the 1886 square-rigger Balclutha, and the Maritime Museum in the supercool Aquatic Park Bathhouse building, a 1939 Art Deco-offshoot style that looks like an ocean liner for landlubbers.

Details: Near the Hyde Street end of Jefferson Street; www.nps.gov/safr/index.htm

— ANGELA HILL

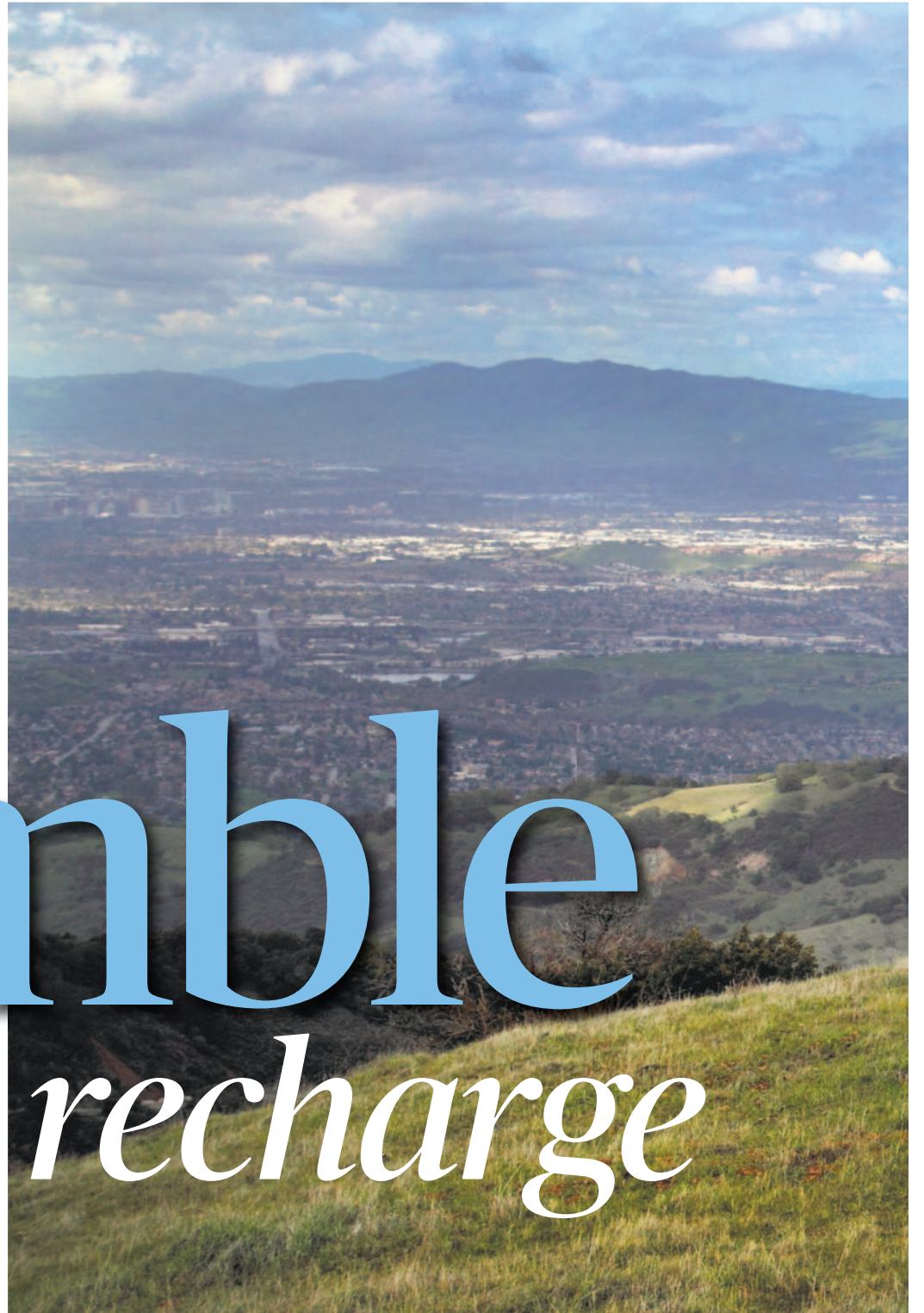


FAR LEFT: DOUG DURAN/STAFF, LEFT: KARL MONDON/STAFF

*There's fun afoot on
Bay Area trails plus great
spots for post-trek relaxing*



Ramble *and recharge*





FAR LEFT: COURTESY DINO VOURNAS, LEFT: JIM GENSHEIMER/STAFF ARCHIVES

Gorgeous and expansive views abound at many a high spot in the Bay Area's assortment of national, state, regional and county parks.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES



TOP: ARIC CRABB/BSTAFF, BOTTOM: JIM GENSHEIMER/STAFF

BY MARTHA ROSS

Sure, it's cold outside. But this is the Bay Area, so the weather's rarely too unpleasant to keep us inside, not when we have such stunning natural beauty right outside our door.

So lace up your sturdiest shoes for a hike or stroll at one of our many national, state, regional and county parks. Winter is an especially stunning time to hit the trail, with the fog lifting along the coast and crystal clear skies offering up stunning views. Inland, rain turns the hills green, fills creeks and sends water rushing over cliffs and down ravines.

And the combination of exercise and cold air means you'll want to relax and warm up afterwards. So here are some good hike and après-hike pairings.

A family stops for a photo opportunity along a waterfall trail at Mount Diablo State Park. Water rushes over boulders in the Sunol Regional Wilderness' Little Yosemite area, right.



1 Waterfalls: The Bay Area's 'Little Yosemite'

This scenic gorge in the hills of Sunol Regional Wilderness may not have Half Dome, but it still offers boulders to climb and a rushing creek and waterfalls to enjoy after rain. The Canyon View Trail (4.8-mile loop, moderate) to Little Yosemite travels through oak-studded grasslands to the gorge. Find trail maps and details at www.ebparks.org/parks/sunol/.

Après-hike: Grab a drink and a bite at Bosco's Bones & Brew, an Old West-themed watering hole and steakhouse, named for a black Labrador mix who was the small town's honorary mayor in the 1990s. It's open Tuesday-Sunday at 11922 Main St. in Sunol. Or opt for the new (and adorable) Casa Bella Bistro, which offers espresso drinks, breakfast sandwiches and lunch fare Tuesday-Sunday at 11984 Main St., Sunol; www.casabellabistro.com.

2 Waterfalls: Mt. Diablo's Donner Canyon

Only hikers invigorated by dry, blistering heat tackle the slopes of Mount Diablo in the summer. For

Hikers cross Donner Creek along Mount Diablo's Falls Trail, below.



KONSTANDINOS GOUZENIDIS / DAILY NEWS

everyone else, winter rains transform Donner Canyon, near Clayton, into the site of picturesque waterfalls. The sound of rushing water accompanies hikers through a seasonably lush landscape of native grasses and other vegetation on this trail (5.8 miles, moderately challenging). And the possibility of spotting snow atop the 3,849-foot peak is another bonus after a winter storm. Find out more at www.parks.ca.gov.

Après-hike: Refuel afterward with burgers, chicken classics and other comfort food at Ed's Mudville Grill in historic Clayton. Open daily at 6200 Center St.; <https://edsmudvillegrill.com>.

3 Views: Windy Hill Open Space Preserve

On a clear day, this breezy Woodside hilltop and the surrounding 1,335-acre preserve offer views all the way to San Francisco and across the bay. The preserve's most popular trail is the Windy Hill Loop (7.2 miles, challenging), which hikers can start either from Skyline Boulevard or in Portola Valley. With a 1,400-foot rise in elevation, the trail travels through a variety of landscapes: madrone and oak forests, lush redwood forests and rolling, wide-open, chaparral-covered hills. Find trail maps and directions at www.openspace.org/preserves

Après-hike: Named for Arlo Guthrie's famous song, Alice's Restaurant is a favorite destination for hikers, bikers, artists and entrepreneurs. It serves gourmet burgers, scrambles, housemade pies and local wines and beer. Open daily at 17288 Skyline Blvd. in Woodside; www.alicesrestaurant.com.

A jogger can pick up speed on the mostly flat Sawyer Camp Trail at Crystal Springs Reservoir.



ARIC CRABB/STAFF

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

A gentle 3.4-mile trek leads to a lovely destination at Tennessee Valley Beach south of Mill Valley.

TOP PHOTO: J. PHOTO: FRANKIE FROST, BOTTOM PHOTO: COURTESY DINO VOURNAS*

4 Views: Mount Tamalpais, ocean to redwoods

A popular loop (6.5 miles, challenging) starts at Stinson Beach and follows three trails — the Dispsea, Steep Ravine and Matt Davis — and offers the best combination of California coastal experiences: a lush canyon with towering redwoods and magnificent Pacific views. Waterfalls tumble along Webb Creek in Steep Ravine following winter rains. Find trail information at www.parks.ca.gov.

Après-hike: From Stinson Beach, head south on Highway 1 to the Pelican Inn, a hotel

and restaurant modeled after a Tudor-era English country inn, with pub dining options and a selection of ales, draught beers, sherries and ports. Open daily at 10 Pacific Way, Muir Beach; www.pelicaninn.com.

5 Rolling hills: Sawyer Camp Trail

One of the Bay Area's most popular recreation options, Crystal Springs Reservoir offers a trail (7 miles out and back, mostly flat) that stretches along the eastern shore of Crystal Springs Reservoir up to San Andreas Lake, passing through protected watershed land

Some Bay Area trails are bike friendly for long stretches at a time.





that features a few gently rolling hills. Find park maps and trail information at <https://parks.smcgov.org>.

Après-hike: Grab burgers, sandwiches, pancakes and other family-style fare at Neal's Coffee Shop in nearby Crystal Springs Village. Open daily at 114 De Anza Blvd, San Mateo; www.nealscoffeeshop.com.

6 Beaches: Tennessee Valley

Eager to see the Marin Headlands but loathe to deal with traffic? Just south of Mill Valley, hikers will find another route to the Headlands. This popular trail (3.4 miles, easy) offers a gentle round-trip hike through shrublands and wetlands before arriving at the Pacific Ocean. Feeling more ambitious? Uphill trails spiral off at the beach and trailhead. Find details at www.nps.gov/goga.

Après-hike: The venerable Dipsea Cafe, open daily at 200 Highway One and conveniently close to the trailhead parking turnoff, is one tasty option; www.dipseacafe.com. Or head to Mill Valley's Depot Bookstore and Cafe to browse literary and non-fiction titles and enjoy pastries, lunch and people-watching on the outdoor terrace. Open daily at 87 Throckmorton Ave., Mill Valley; www.millvalleybookdepot-cafe.com.

Water flows create interesting rock patterns in the Little Yosemite area of the Sunol Regional Wilderness.

Mount Tam's famous Dipsea Trail draws families and solo hikers down to Stinson Beach, right.



FAR LEFT: SARAH DUSSAULT/STAFF. LEFT: COURTESY DINO VOURNAS

7 Tidepools: Pillar's Point to Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

The bluff trails (lengths vary, leisurely) from Pillar's Point up through Moss Beach offer hikers views of Half Moon Bay, the Santa Cruz Mountains and Mavericks surf break. Hikes start at Pillar Point and in Moss Beach and include an ADA-accessible portion of the California Coastal Trail and de-

tours to the tide pools at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. Find details on the marine reserve at parks.smcgov.org/fitzgerald-marine-reserve.

Après-hike: The Moss Beach Distillery is a popular destination for beer, lunch and Sunday brunch. This historical landmark is open daily at 140 Beach Way in Moss Beach; www.mossbeachdistillery.com.

Premiere pairings

So the weather outside is frightful?
Even California gets rain squalls, hail storms and occasional
snow sightings. When it's too cold or damp to do much more
than peek outside, take refuge at one of the Bay Area's art deco
film palaces or get cozy on the couch ...





Park once to watch a flick and have a feast near these Bay Area cinemas

BY MARTHA ROSS

Even movie lovers who don't follow the Oscars race can still celebrate the lead-up — the months in late fall and early winter when Hollywood fills theaters with its best films for grownups.

Even better, the Bay Area offers exceptional ways to enjoy these awards-season selections — beautiful arthouse or independent theaters in picturesque neighborhoods with cool bars, cafes or restaurants nearby. On a rainy

The marquee of the Alameda Theatre and Cineplex lights up the evening sky.

Pair that movie with buttermilk-fried chicken sliders and grilled flank steak at Alameda's Cinema Grill next door.



D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF PHOTOS

ENTERTAINMENT

afternoon or crisp winter night, you can duck into one of these theaters to watch a good drama, a smart comedy or an uplifting epic. Then pair that experience with coffee or drinks with friends, or a romantic pre- or post-film lunch or dinner.

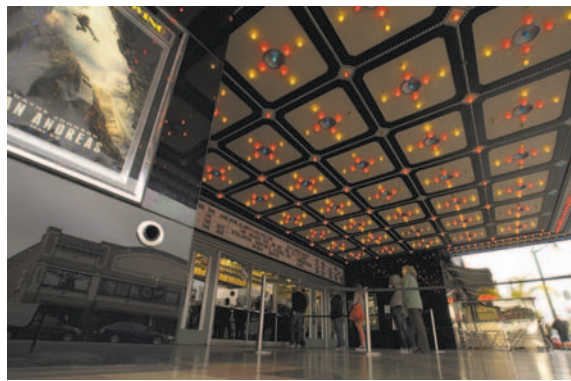
Here's a baker's dozen of Bay Area theaters, neighborhoods and eateries offering premiere movie-going experiences.

SEE THEM FIRST

1 Downtown Berkeley: Shattuck Cinemas typically lands Oscar-bait independent features an entire week before most other Bay Area venues. The theater's at 2230 Shattuck Ave. Check out the movie lineup at www.landmarktheatres.com. A cosmopolitan selection of dining options is nearby, including super popular Cal-Mexican restaurant Comal and its taqueria spin-off, Comal Next Door, 2020 and 2024 Shattuck Ave.; www.comalberkeley.com.

Berkeley's Comal serves upscale Mexican fare, and its recently opened Comal Next Door is a taqueria. Both are right down the street from the Shattuck Cinemas.

Patrons queue up to purchase tickets at the Alameda Theatre and Cineplex.



Vintage posters line the walls of the Los Gatos Theatre's upstairs screening room, but the room itself is brand new with 38 reclining seats. Some of them even have foot rests. The movie screen in this room is 18 feet by 10 feet.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RAY CHAVEZ/STAFF, D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF, D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF, D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF



3 Berkeley: The charming Rialto Cinemas Elmwood theater along lively College Avenue screens a diverse mix of independent and foreign films at 2966 College Ave.; www.rialtocinemas.com. Two blocks down, Baker and Commons serves coffee, pastries, lunch and dinner, with live music on Saturday nights, at 2900 College Ave.; www.bakerandcommons.com.

4 Oakland: Built in 1926, the historic Grand Lake Theater boasts \$6 matinee tickets daily at 3200 Grand Ave; www.renaissance-rialto.com. The convivial hangout Sidebar, across from Lake Merritt, is known for its delicious burgers and creative cocktails. Find it at 542 Grand Ave., <http://sidebar-oaktown.com>.

2 Los Gatos: The century-old Los Gatos Theatre reopened in 2014 with new digital technology at 41 N. Santa Cruz Ave.; www.losgatos theatre.com. Catch a movie, then grab drinks and a bite at Lexington House at 40 N. Santa Cruz Ave.; www.thelexlg.com.



Moviegoers wait in line for a screening at the Rialto Cinemas Elmwood theater on College Avenue in Berkeley.

A sundae made at Fenton's Creamery in Oakland.

Patrons leaving the Grand Lake Theater after the show may be on their way for a nosh at Sidebar, a six-minute walk away.



TOP: RAY CHAVEZ/STAFF; FAR LEFT: D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF; LEFT: LAURA A. ODA/STAFF



TOP: EURYDICE GAIKA. BOTTOM: COURTESY OF MARY ORLIN

5 San Jose: The CineArts Santana Row multiplex is in the heart of San Jose's upscale retail and dining district at 3088 Olsen Drive, www.cinemark.com. The EMC Seafood & Raw Bar encourages conversation with shareable Asian-inspired plates, including sushi, noodles and oysters at 378 Santana Row, Suite 1100; www.emcseafood.com.

6 Oakland: The cozy Piedmont Theatre multiplex along Oakland's bustling Piedmont Avenue screens independent and foreign films at 4186 Piedmont Ave., www.landmarktheatres.com. The nearby Fenton's Creamery is a retro destination for classic burgers, grilled sandwiches and, of course, elaborate ice cream concoctions at 4226 Piedmont Ave.; www.fentonscreamery.com.



Ice cream concoctions don't get much more elaborate than they do at Fenton's Creamery, a retro spot near the Piedmont Theatre that also serves classic grill fare.

You can head to Ramen Nagi for a steaming bowl of noodles and broth before or after you take in a movie at Palo Alto's Landmark Aquarius Theatre.

Season's screenings:

Cram some couch potato time into your busy holiday schedule

BY CHUCK BARNEY

When the weather outside is frightful, the thought of hunkering down for a TV binge-a-thon is all the more delightful.

Ah, but we know what you're thinking: The holidays are too hectic for that. You've got gifts to wrap, cookies to bake, parties to attend and halls to deck.

Nevertheless, you're going to need some chill-out time. For sanity's sake, it's a must.

With that in mind, we've made a list (and checked it twice) of great quick-binge shows that can be smoothly wedged in between the seasonal activities — and around all those must-see animated specials and sappy Hallmark flicks. These are shows that have aired for only a single season (thus far) and consist of 10 episodes or less. Also, they're shows that tend to go down easy — in other words, not “The Handmaid’s Tale.”

Now grab some hot chocolate and a blanket, and get comfy.

“Killing Eve” (Amazon Prime, iTunes)

Watch if: You like a little spice in your egg nog.

This deliciously offbeat, British-made thriller is pegged to a game of cat-and-mouse between an M16 investigator (Sandra Oh) and a glamorous serial assassin (Jodie Comer). As the electrifying twists and turns play out, the women become obsessed with one another. It's suspenseful, irreverent, sexy and, at times, laugh-out-loud funny. (Eight episodes, 42 minutes each).

“The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” (Amazon Prime)

Watch if: You're up for some post-Hanukkah chuckles.

“Gilmore Girls” creator Amy Sherman-Palladino delivers



The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel

another hilarious, hyper-verbal winner. Set in New York City in the 1950s, it follows a Jewish housewife (Rachel Brosnahan) who, after her marriage unravels, discovers that she has a talent for stand-up comedy. Brosnahan is a real live wire — and absolutely irresistible. Here's your chance to see why the show cleaned up at the Emmys. (Eight episodes, 46-61 minutes each).

“Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan” (Amazon Prime)

Watch if: You prefer some not-so-silent nights.

John Krasinski (“The Office”) assumes the role of the iconic CIA operative in this modern-day prequel to Clancy's novels and the five movies they spawned. Jack starts out as a rather nerdy, low-level analyst at Langley, but soon finds himself hunting terrorists in faraway lands. Cue the gunfire, explosions and rock-'em-sock-'em brawls. (Eight episodes, 42-64 minutes each).

“The Haunting of Hill House” (Netflix)

Watch if: You crave a nightmare before Christmas.

Keep the lights on for this scare-filled reimagining of Shirley Jackson's acclaimed gothic horror novel. It follows five siblings who

grew up in America's most famous haunted house. Now adults, they're reunited by a tragic event, which forces them to confront the ghosts of their own pasts. (10 episodes, 43-71 minutes each).

“Big Little Lies” (HBO Now; HBO Go; Amazon Prime; iTunes)

Watch if: You'd rather spend the holidays in Monterey.

Yes, there's still time to catch up before Season 2 — with Meryl Streep — arrives next year. This glossy miniseries offers a bit of everything: A tantalizing whodunit, provocative social satire and lots of seaside real estate porn. It's all served up by an amazing cast that includes Reese Witherspoon, Nicole Kidman, Shailene Woodley, Alexander Skarsgard and Laura Dern. (Seven episodes, 52-58 minutes each).

“Barry” (HBO Now; HBO Go; iTunes)

Watch if: You're the type who enjoys “Bad Santa.”

Bill Hader and Henry Winkler earned Emmys for their performances in this brutally dark comedy about a low-level hit man (Hader) who travels to Los Angeles to kill someone. Once there, he follows his mark into an acting class and catches the show-biz bug. Will this be his salvation? (Eight 30-minute episodes).

“Forever” (Amazon Prime)

Watch if: You need a comedy to warm your Grinchy heart.

In this little gem, “Saturday Night Live” alums Fred Armisen and Maya Rudolph play Oscar and June, a loving, long-married couple whose life is incredibly routine. That all changes when she suggests they shake things up with a weekend ski trip. Packed with surprises, “Forever” is a funny, poignant and even surreal exploration into the power of love. (Eight episodes, 25-30 minutes each).

7 San Francisco: The intimate Embarcadero Center Cinema also lands independent Oscar-bait features ahead of other theaters, www.landmarktheatres.com. The theater's Financial District location puts it within walking distance of the Ferry Building Marketplace's many foodie attractions, including the renowned Slanted Door, the Vietnamese eatery at One Ferry Building, No. 3; www.slanteddoor.com.

8 Menlo Park: The Landmark's Guild Theatre is a single-screen theater in a renovated 1926 building at 949 El Camino Real; www.landmarktheatres.com. Over on Santa Cruz Avenue, Camper is a new casual, farm-driven restaurant from culinary heavy-hitters, 898 Santa Cruz Ave., <https://campermp.com>.



Ramen Nagi also dishes up a Red King bowl with pork belly and a pork-red miso ball in a spicy chile oil broth.



BOTTOM: D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF. TOP: SAL PIZARRO/STAFF

9 Alameda: The renovated 1932 Alameda Theatre palace screens first-run Oscar contenders and hosts classic movie nights. And the Cinema Grill next door serves casual entrees and cocktails — on trays you can take into the theater — and hosts live music nights as well, at 2301 and 2317 Central Ave., www.alamedatheatres.com.

10 Orinda: The independently owned, art deco Orinda Theatre screens first-run films and hosts classic movie nights, too, in Orinda Square; <http://lamorindatheatres.com>. The adjacent Cine Cuvée wine bar serves wine, beer, cocktails and delicious bar snacks. www.cinecuvée.com.

Patrons hang out at the Cedar Room, a new bar and eatery next door to the Pruneyard Cinemas.

The Alameda Theatre screens first-run films and classics — and on occasion some live showings that thrill Golden State Warriors fans.





11 Livermore: Billing itself as “a date night wrapped into one,” the Vine Cinema and Alehouse downtown features sofa seating and a fairly extensive lunch, dinner and bar and wine menu, delivered by the Zephyr Grill and Bar next door. 1722 First St.; www.vinecinema.com

CINEMA SLEEK

12 Palo Alto: The recently renovated Landmark Aquarius Theatre near Stanford University features luxury seating, expanded concession choices and beer and wine at 430 Emerson St., www.landmarktheatres.com. Ramen Nagi, a Japanese chain beloved for its fusion take on noodles and broth, opened its first U.S. outpost a few blocks away at 541 Bryant St., <http://ramennagiusa.com>.

13 Campbell: The new Pruneyard Cinemas exemplifies the new generation of movie palaces that offer luxury seating and a full-service menu for in-theater dining. If you're a purist and don't like to eat while you watch, you can fuel up before or after at the theater's Cedar Room bar next door. 1875 S. Bascom Ave., www.pruneyardcinemas.com.

Campbell's new Pruneyard Cinemas offers luxury seating and in-theater dining — and a new bar and restaurant next door.



FAR LEFT: SAL PIZARRO/STAFF. LEFT: GETTY IMAGES

‘Tis the seasonings that make the popcorn

Tossed with melted butter and a little salt, hot fresh popcorn is pretty perfect as is. But one glance at Pinterest says it all: Creative popcorn seasonings and theater-style popcorn bars are officially a thing.

As you might expect, the flavor combinations out there run the gamut from highbrow — Maldon salt, lemon zest and fresh rosemary, for example — to eyebrow raising. (Isn't popcorn mixed with Fritos, scallions and melted cheddar just misguided nachos?)

If you're looking to push the popcorn envelope for your next TV binge-fest or movie-streaming night, San Francisco's Riddler provides some gourmet inspiration.

At Jen Pelka's Hayes Valley Champagne bar, the bubbly is paired with caviar, of course, but also with potato chips, tater-tot

waffles and complimentary popcorn. Guests help themselves to bowls of buttery just-popped kernels, then add a seasoning flourish from the row of stylish shakers of custom flavored salts — black truffle, perhaps, or everything bagel, cinnamon-sugar, Bloody Mary or even Mexican corn.

The latter blend, inspired by Mexican street corn, combines powdered white cheddar, kosher salt, chipotle chile powder, dried cilantro, grated lime zest and a pinch of cayenne. And Riddler's popular ScarJo is a truffle-Parmesan mix named after Scarlett Johansson. Here's how to make it at home.

— JACKIE BURRELL

ScarJo Popcorn Seasoning

Makes about 2/3 cup

Ingredients:

7 tablespoons kosher salt
1 tablespoon plus 1/2 teaspoon white truffle salt
2 tablespoons plus 1 1/2 teaspoons powdered Parmesan
1 1/2 teaspoons dried powdered sage

Directions: Mix everything in a small bowl. Sprinkle onto popcorn immediately, or store in a small jar to use later.

— COURTESY ZOË SALCEDO, CHEF DE CUISINE, THE RIDDLER

GET DRESSED TO KILL 2018!



The Bay Area throws some super-cool New Year's parties

BY ANGELA HILL

Fling aside those everyday yoga pants and sweatshirts and dig down to the glimmer of excitement in the back of your closet, that cute little number with the sequins and fringe that rarely sees the lights of your kitchen, much less the ones on Broadway.

This is no time for Bay Area casual, people! This is New Year's Eve in the city with all the glitz, glam and gams galore that go with it, even here in tech town. It's the one night of the year when a hipster can wear a tux and not be laughed out of the kombucha bar.

CELEBRATE

So there you are, dressed to the nines and ready to turn it up to 11. But you need a venue to match. Well, skip the typical bar scene with partiers crammed elbow-to-elbow like sardines — assuming sardines have elbows — and try something beyond the bottle pop and countdown. Ring in a fresh start with one of these ideas.

And ... Happy New Year! (Insert confetti and kisses here.)

SHOW OFF

Be seen on the scene of a San Francisco classic show that's always fresh. It's the satire and sass of Beach Blanket Babylon's New Year's Eve Finale. Babylon, the city's most famous and hilarious pop-culture musical revue at Club Fugazi in North Beach, boasts wild costumes and outrageously gigantic hats. The show leaves no public figure or wacky event from 2018 untouched, mocking the oh-so-mockable even more creatively than social media memes can do it, with skits and songs about Donald and Melania, Kim Jong-un, Colin Kaepernick, Vladimir Putin, Beyonce, Harvey Weinstein, Hillary Clinton, Prince Harry and Meghan and even the Golden State Warriors. No one is safe!

Details: Tickets for regular BBB shows run \$30-\$130; www.beachblanketbabylon.com.



CRUISE INTO 2019

Fog or no — well, probably fog — San Francisco puts on a spectacular New Year's fireworks show over the bay at midnight. And the best place to view the sparkle (or the illuminated clouds) is from the bay itself aboard one of the many party boats from cruise lines like Commodore, Hornblower or the Red & White Fleet. They all offer NYE packages, most

Beach Blanket Babylon's New Year's Eve spectacular, left and above, pulls out all the stops.

leaving from the Embarcadero, some from Alameda. Indeed, there will probably be more boats than water out there.

One nautical — and maybe a little naughty — party that'll float your boat is the Speakeasy New Year's Eve Cruise 2019, hosted by San Francisco Nightlife on the Fume Blanc Commodore. It launches from Pier 40 on the Embarcadero at 7:30

p.m. You'll need to add a boa to that sequined number and a fedora with the tux, because this themed trip takes you around the bay and back to the 1920s with music, blackjack tables and cigarette girls (selling candy, too). Tickets start around \$200 and go up from there.

Details: <https://bit.ly/2Pm-nYHm>.



CLASSY AND SASSY

You might think a New Year celebration at the symphony would be a stuffed-shirt affair. Hah. Wrong. So very, very wrong, especially when San Francisco drag queen Peaches Christ is co-hosting the party. Yes, the San Francisco Symphony has teamed up with Peaches and conductor Edwin Outwater for a star-studded lineup of surprise guests, delectable vocalists, holiday hits, big laughs and even bigger hair at Davies Symphony Hall starting at 8 p.m. Tickets start at \$60; www.sfsymphony.org.



The San Francisco Symphony's New Year's Eve plans promise fabulous festivities, with a show that includes a festive lobby, above, and an appearance by Jane Lynch of "Glee" fame.

Conductor Edwin Outwater takes the baton for the San Francisco Symphony's New Year's Eve concert.



CELEBRATE



COURTESY JAGC PHOTOGRAPHY

Peaches Christ entertains at the San Francisco Symphony's New Year's Eve festivities.

OH, GET A ROOM

Glamorous hotel parties abound, which is a really good idea for staying the night and off the roads. Check out the International Ball at The Palace Hotel (www.aykutevents.com/nye/) with DJs playing Euro tunes, top 40, Latin, Persian, hip-hop and more. Or try EPIC New Year's Eve 2019 (<https://bit.ly/2Ao4g5Z>), with giant screens and an "epic" balloon drop inside The Park Central Hotel on Union Square.

And then there's M.O.A.N.Y. (<https://bit.ly/2D1pyJg>), an apt acronym for the "Mother Of All New Year's" parties, held at the Regency Ballroom on Van Ness. Some of the best DJs from San Francisco and Las Vegas will be spinning sets from the lavish ballroom stage, with more partying going on in the Parlor Room and the Social Hall with casino tables and photo booths. It's not a hotel, but it's close to several, so ... get a room, and get celebrating!





GETTY IMAGES

RECHARGE

Chillin' into 2019

Sipping Champagne from a stiletto and partying 'till 3 a.m. on a fireworks cruise around San Francisco Bay is not for everyone. Some of us prefer to welcome a new calendar in quietude and tranquility, perhaps pondering the past while poised for the future. Here are a few places to experience that kind of soothing serenity for New Year 2019:

1 TAKE TIME FOR TEA

The Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park is open on New Year's Day. In fact, it never takes holidays. Follow the winding paths across wooden bridges and stepping stones, past koi ponds and pagodas, and sip tea in the traditional Tea House. It's the oldest formal Japanese garden open to the public in the United States. Winter hours are 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.; \$9 general admission; www.japaneseteagardensf.com.

The Japanese Tea Garden at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park is open every day, including New Year's Day.

2 WALK A LABYRINTH

It's an ancient mystical tradition found in many religions, considered meditative, contemplative, restorative. Here's a trio of spots to try: Stanford University has an outdoor labyrinth adjacent to the Windhover building at 370 Santa Teresa St. that's open to visitors any time of day; www.stanford.edu. Grace Cathedral atop San Francisco's Nob Hill offers serenity in its cavernous sanctuary with indoor and outdoor labyrinths, plus holiday musical performances in this glorious setting at 1100 California St.; www.gracecathedral.org. And Walnut Avenue United Methodist Church in Walnut Creek hosts an 11-circuit pattern built in stone by the Contra Costa Labyrinth Project. It's open to the public at 260 Walnut Ave.; www.umc.org.

RECHARGE



GETTY IMAGES

3 WATCH THE SUNRISE

Yes, the sun rises in the east, but it still shows up here eventually. A beautiful spot to capture the rays and sweeping views is Lands End in San Francisco — and there's a labyrinth to boot, a rock-lined pattern created by artist Eduardo Aguilera in 2004, just off the Coastal Trail. Start from the Lands End Lookout, 680 Point Lobos Ave.; www.nps.gov/goga/planyourvisit/landsend.htm.

San Francisco's rocky, windswept Land's End is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The ruins of Sutro Baths add to the striking landscape.

4 SILENT DISCO YOGA ON THE BEACH

It's not really disco per se, but it is yoga, and it's on Baker Beach. The special New Year's Day class, held at 3 p.m. by Outdoor Yoga SF, provides headphones so you can hear the yoga instruction and curated music while you stretch and meditate. All levels are welcome, and it's a beautiful way to get outside, dance with the ocean and feel alive. It's a ticketed event, \$24; www.outdoorogasf.com.

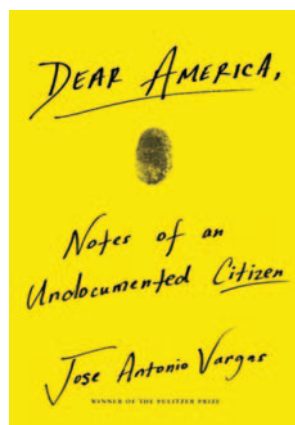
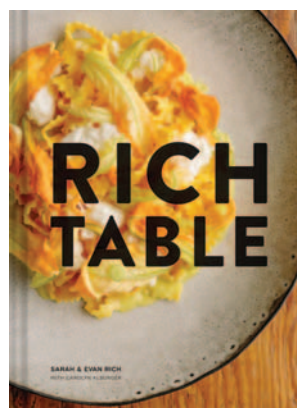
5 TAKE A HIKE

There's a free Oakland hiking tour on New Year's Day provided by Oakland Trails. Starting promptly at 9 a.m., guides will take you on a steady six-mile hike through Dimond Canyon and Joaquin Miller Park, finishing at the top of the ridge at the Chabot Space & Science Center. Bring water, sturdy shoes and bus fare (\$2.35) for a portion of the route. Meet at La Farine Bakery, 3411 Fruitvale Ave., Oakland; www.oaklandtrails.org.

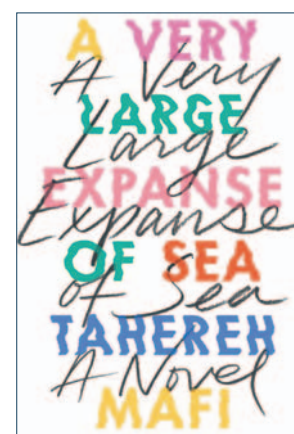
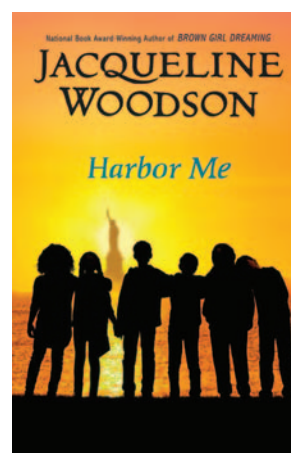
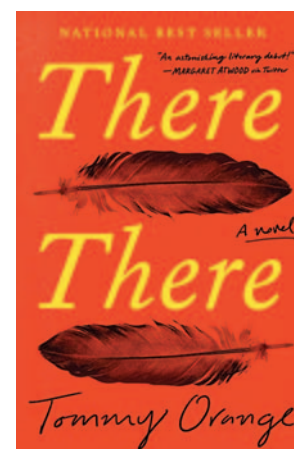
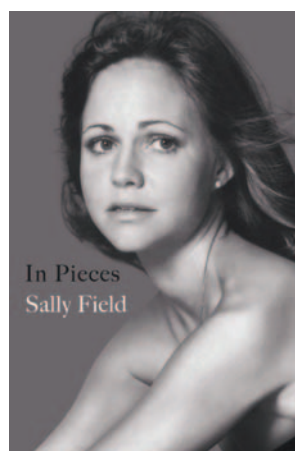
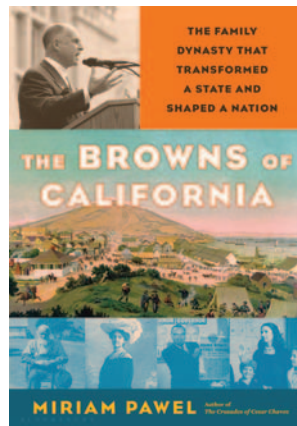
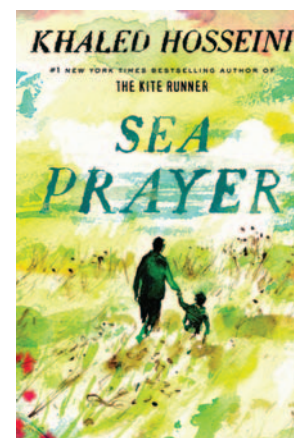
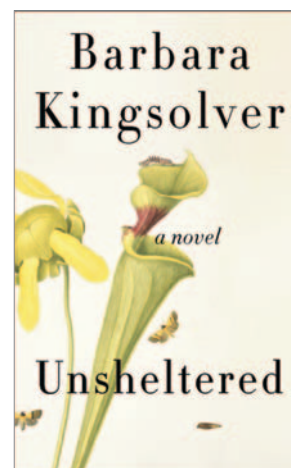
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